



A frankly
shocking
novel about
a man's
obsession
with his
mistress

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

By GEORGES SIMENON

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IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

I

Sunday, November 4

SCARCELY two hours ago, after lunch, in the drawing-room where we had gone to drink our coffee, I was standing in front of the window, close enough to the glass to feel its cold dampness, when, behind me, I heard my wife say:

'Will you be going out this afternoon?'

And these words, so simple, so commonplace, seemed to me heavy with meaning, as if they concealed between their syllables thoughts which neither Viviane nor myself dared express. I did not reply at once, not because I wasn't sure of my intentions, but because for a moment I hung suspended in that rather terrifying universe, more real, essentially, than the everyday world, which gives you the feeling of discovering the underside of life.

In the end I must have stammered:

'No. Not today.'

She knows I have no reason to go out. She has guessed it, like everything else; maybe she checks up on my actions and movements as well. I don't blame her for it any more than she blames me for what is happening to me.

At the moment she asked her question, I was watching, through the cold, dismal rain which has been falling for three days, since All Hallows to be precise, a tramp walking up and down under the Pont-Marie, slapping his thighs to get warm. In particular I was staring at a heap of dark rags, up against the stone wall, wondering whether it was really moving or whether that was an illusion caused by the quivering of the air and the movement of the rain.

It was moving, I was sure of it a little later, when an arm emerged from the rags, then a woman's face, bloated and framed in tousled hair. The man

stopped walking up and down, turned towards his companion for Lord knows what dialogue, then, while she was getting into a sitting position, went and pulled out, from between two stones, a bottle, half full, which he handed to her and from which she took a swig.

In the ten years we have been living on the Quai d'Anjou in the Île Saint-Louis, I have often watched the tramps. I've seen all kinds, women too, but this is the first time I've seen any of them acting like a real couple. Why did that touch me, making me think of a male animal and his female snug in their forest lair?

Some people talk about Viviane and me as a couple of wild creatures, I've been told, and no doubt they don't fail to stress that among wild beasts the female is the more ferocious.

Before turning round and going up to the tray on which the coffee was served, I had time to register another image: a very tall man with a ruddy face emerging from the hatch of a barge anchored just opposite our house. He had his black raincoat over his head to brave the dripping universe and, an empty quart bottle hanging from each arm, he started down the slippery gang-plank between the boat and the quay. At the moment, he and the two tramps, together with a yellowish dog squeezing up against a black tree, were the only living things in the landscape.

'Are you going down to the office?' my wife asked again, while I was finishing my cup of coffee, still standing.

I said yes. I have always detested Sundays, especially Sundays in Paris, which produce in me a restlessness which comes close to panic. The prospect of going and waiting in a queue, under an umbrella, outside some cinema, makes me sick; so does the prospect of strolling along the Champs-Élysées, for example, or in the Tuileries, or of going for a drive in a line of cars, on the Fontainebleau road.

We got home late last night. After a dress rehearsal at the Theatre de la Michodiere, we went to Maxim's for supper and wound up, about three o'clock in the morning, in a basement bar somewhere near the Rond-Point, frequented by actors and film people.

I'm not as good at going without sleep as I was a few years ago. Viviane, though, never seems to feel tired.

How much longer did we stay in the drawing-room without saying anything? At least five minutes, I would swear, and five minutes of that silence seem long. I was looking at my wife as little as possible. For the last

few weeks I have avoided looking her in the face and have cut short our private conversations. Did she perhaps want to talk? I thought she was going to when, as I had my back half turned, she opened her mouth, hesitating, and finally brought out, instead of the words she wanted to say:

'I'm going to Corine's soon. If you feel like it later in the afternoon, you can come and pick me up there.'

Corine de Langelle is a friend who causes quite a lot of talk and who owns one of the most beautiful town houses in Paris, in the Rue Saint-Dominique. Among her various original ideas, one is to keep open house on Sunday afternoons.

'It's not true that everyone goes to the races,' she will explain, 'and not many wives go shooting with their husbands. Why should one have to be bored just because it's Sunday?'

I walked round and round the drawing-room and finally muttered :

'See you later.'

I crossed the corridor and opened the door of the office. After all these years, it is still a queer feeling to enter it from the gallery. It was Viviane's idea. When the flat below ours came up for sale, she advised me to buy it and set up my chambers there, because we were beginning to be cramped, especially for entertaining. The ceiling of one of the rooms, the largest, was removed and replaced by a gallery at the level of the floor above.

This produces a very high room, with two rows of windows, lined with books top and bottom, which in fact looks a bit like a public library, and it took me some time to get used to working and receiving my clients there.

Still, I did fix myself up, in one of the original rooms, a more private retreat where I prepare my briefs and where a leather couch enables me to take a nap without undressing.

I took a nap today. Did I really sleep? I'm not sure. In the dusk I closed my eyes and I don't think I stopped hearing the water running down the rainpipe. I suppose Viviane took a rest too, in the red silk boudoir she fixed up for herself next to our bedroom.

It is a little after four o'clock. She must be dressing and she will probably drop in to kiss me goodbye before she goes to Corine's.

I feel that my eyes are swollen. For a long time I haven't been looking well, and the medicine Dr. Pémal has prescribed does no good. All the same I keep on conscientiously swallowing the drops and pills which form a small arsenal in front of my place at table.

I have always had big eyes, a big head, so big that there are only two or three shops in Paris where I can find hats to fit me. At school they used to compare me to a toad.

Every now and then I hear a crack, because the wood of the gallery warps in damp weather, and each time I raise my head, as though caught doing something I shouldn't, expecting to see Viviane coming downstairs.

I have never hidden anything from her and yet I shall hide this from her and keep it locked up in the Renaissance cupboard in my den. Before beginning to write, I made sure that the key, which no one has ever used, hadn't been lost and that the lock works. I shall have to find a place for this key, too: behind certain books in the library, for instance; it is enormous and wouldn't fit into my pocket.

I have taken from my desk drawer a cream-coloured manila folder with my name and address stamped on it.

Lucien Gobillot
Avocat à la Cour d'Appel de Paris
17 bis, Quai d'Anjou—Paris

Hundreds of these dossiers, more or less stuffed with tragedy—those of my clients—fill a metal filing cabinet which Mademoiselle Bordenave keeps up to date, and I hesitated to write my name in the place where, on the others, the client's name stands. In the end, with an ironical smile, I traced one single word in red pencil: *Myself*.

It is, in fact, my own dossier that I am beginning, and it is not impossible that it may some day be put to use. I waited more than ten minutes, apprehensive, before writing the first sentence, tempted as I was to begin it like a will with:

I the undersigned, being sound in body and in mind . . .

Because it is something like a will, too. To be more precise, I don't know yet what it will be like and I wonder if there will be, in the margin, the cabalistic signs I use for my clients.

It is, in fact, my practice to jot down, in their presence, while they are talking, the essence of what they say, the true and the false, the half-true and the half-false, the exaggerations and the lies, and, at the same time, I record my momentary impressions by means of signs which make sense only to me. Some of these signs are unexpected, baroque, like those little men or those shapeless doodles that some judges sketch on their blotters during long speeches by counsel.

I am trying to make fun of myself, not to treat myself as a tragic case. And yet, isn't it already a symptom that I need to explain myself in writing? For whom? Why? I have no idea. In case of emergency, in short, as those estimable characters say who lay money by. Against the possibility that things should turn out badly.

Can they turn out any other way? Even in Viviane I sense a feeling which has always been foreign to her and which looks the very image of pity. She doesn't know, either, what is in store for us. She understands, just the same, that things can't go on like this, that something is bound to happen, no matter what.

Pémal, too, who has been looking after me for fifteen years, suspects it, and when he gives me prescriptions I'm sure he does it without conviction. Besides, when he comes to see me, he puts on that free and easy, jaunty air, behind which he must hide when he visits someone who is seriously ill.

'What's the trouble today?'

Nothing. Nothing and everything. Then he talks about my being forty-five and about the terrific load of work I've always carried and keep on carrying. He makes a joke:

'There comes a time when the most powerful and the most perfect motor needs some minor repairs. . . .'

Has he heard about Yvette? Pémal doesn't move in the same circles as we do, where my private life is no secret. He has doubtless read, in magazines, certain echoes which make real sense only to people in the know.

Besides, it's not only a matter of Yvette. It's the whole machine, to use his expression, which isn't running properly, and that doesn't date from today, or a few weeks or a few months ago.

Am I going to pretend that I have known for twenty years that it would end badly? That would be exaggerated, though no more so than to claim that it began a year ago with Yvette.

I want to . . .

* * *

My wife has just come downstairs, dressed in a black suit under her mink coat, with a little veil which lends mystery to the upper part of her slightly faded face. When she came up to me, I could smell her scent.

'Do you think you'll join me?'

'I don't know.'

'We could have dinner out afterwards.'

'I'll ring you at Corine's.'

For the moment I want to stay by myself in my corner, in my own sweat.

She put her lips to my forehead and walked towards the door, her step brisk.

'See you later.'

She didn't ask what I am working on. I watched her go out and got up to press my forehead against the window-pane.

The tramp couple are still under the Pont-Marie. Just now the man and the woman are sitting side by side, leaning against the stone embankment and watching the water flowing under the arches. From this distance you can't see their lips move and it is impossible to know whether they are talking, the lower part of their bodies tucked up in the ragged covers. If they are talking, what do they find to say to each other?

The bargeman must have come back with his ration of wine, and one can make out, in the cabin, the reddish glow of a petroleum lamp.

It's still raining and it's almost dark.

Before beginning to write again, I picked out, on the telephone dial, the number of the flat in the Rue de Ponthieu, and it hurt me to hear the bell ringing there and not be there myself. This is a sensation I'm growing familiar with, a kind of cramp or spasm in the chest, which makes me press my hand to it like a heart patient.

The bell rang for a long time, as though in an empty apartment, and I was expecting it to stop when I heard a click. A sleepy, irritable voice muttered:

'What is it?'

I almost didn't answer. Without giving my name, I asked:

'Were you asleep?'

'It's you! Yes, I was asleep.'

There was a silence. Why ask what she did last night and what time she came home?

'You've not been drinking?'

She has had to get out of bed to answer the telephone, because the instrument isn't in her bedroom but in the sitting-room. She sleeps naked. Her skin, when she first wakes up, has a special smell, her woman's smell mixed with that of nicotine and alcohol. She is drinking much more just lately, as if she too had an intuition that something is in store.

I didn't dare ask her if he was there. What's the use? Why shouldn't he be, since I have, somehow, made way for him? He must be listening, propped

on his elbow, fumbling for cigarettes in the half-light of the bedroom with the curtains drawn.

There are clothes scattered about on the carpet, on the chairs, glasses and bottles lying around, and, as soon as I hang up, she will go to the refrigerator to get some beer.

She makes an effort to ask, as if she were interested:

'Are you working?

'Is it still raining?' she adds—and this tells me that the curtains are drawn.

'Yes.'

That's all. I search for words to say and perhaps she searches too. All I find is a ridiculous:

'Be good.'

I think I can see her pose, on the arm of the green armchair, her pear-shaped breasts, her thin back like that of a scraggy teen-ager, the dark triangle of hair below her stomach which for some reason always looks pathetic to me.

'See you tomorrow.'

'All right: tomorrow.'

I have gone back to the window and already you can't see anything but the garlands of street lights along the Seine, their reflection in the water, and, in the blackness of the wet facades, here and there the rectangle of a lighted window.

I re-read the passage I was writing when my wife interrupted me.

* * *

'I want to...'

I can't remember what I had in mind. Besides, I think that if I want to go on with what I already call my dossier, it will be as well not to re-read anything: not even one sentence.

'I want to...'

Oh yes! That's probably it. To treat myself as I treat my clients. At the Palais de Justice they say I should have made a terrific examining magistrate, because I can get the truth out of the toughest customers. My attitude hardly ever varies and I admit that I take advantage of my physical appearance, my famous toad's face, my protruding eyes which, staring at people as if not seeing them, inspire them with awe. My ugliness is useful to me, giving me the mysterious look of a Chinese porcelain figure.

I let them talk for a time, taking notes myself with a relaxed hand, let them run through the rosary of phrases they prepared before knocking at my door, then, just when they are least expecting it, I interrupt, without moving, my chin still in my left hand:

'No!'

This little word, pronounced without raising my voice, as though in a void, hardly ever fails to disconcert them.

'I assure you . . .' they try to protest.

'No.'

'You accuse me of lying.'

'Things did not just happen as you say

With some people, especially women, that does it, and they immediately smile confidentially. Others go on resisting.

'But I swear . . .'

With these people, I get up as if the consultation were over, and walk towards the door.

'I'll tell you?' they stammer, worried.

'I don't need an explanation; I need the truth. It's up to me, not you, to find the explanations. As long as you prefer to tell lies . . .'

Rarely do I have to press the buzzer.

Obviously I can't go through that act with myself. But if I write, for instance:

'It began a year ago when . . .'

I'm justified in interrupting myself, just as I do other people, with a simple, categorical:

'No!'

That 'no' confuses them even more than the ones before and now they don't understand.

'And yet? they persist, 'it was when I met her that . . .'

'No.'

' Why do you insist it's not true ?'

'Because you have to go further back.'

'Back where to?'

'I don't know. Try.'

They try, and nearly always discover an earlier event to explain their tragedy. I've saved plenty of people that way, not, as they say at the Palais,

by trick of procedure or by playing to the gallery for the benefit of juries, but because I have made them find the reason for their behaviour.

I myself, just like them, was about to write:

'It began . . .'

When? With Yvette, that evening when, getting back from the Palais, I found her sitting all alone in my waiting-room? That's the easy answer, what I'm tempted to call the romantic answer. If it hadn't been Yvette, it would probably have been someone else. Who knows even that the intrusion of a new element into my life was inevitable?

Unfortunately I haven't got, as my clients have when they sit down in what we call the confessional chair, someone facing me to help me find out my own truth, even if it were only by means of a commonplace:

'No!'

I won't allow them to begin at the end or in the middle, and yet that is what I am going to do, because the question of Yvette obsesses me and I need to get rid of it. Afterwards, if I still have the desire and the courage, I'll try to dig more deeply.

It was a Friday, just over a year ago, not much more because it was mid-October. I had just finished pleading a blackmail case in which the verdict had been deferred for a week and I remember that my wife and I were supposed to be having dinner in a restaurant on the Avenue du President Roosevelt with the chief commissioner of police and various other important people. I had walked back from the Palais, just round the corner, and a fine rain was falling, almost warm, quite different from today's.

Mademoiselle Bordenave, my secretary, whom it has never occurred to me to call by her first name and whom I call Bordenave as everybody else does, and as I would call a man, was waiting for me to come back. But little Duret, who has been my assistant for more than four years, had already left.

'There's someone for you in the waiting-room,' announced Bordenave, raising her head beneath the green lampshade.

She is a blonde rather than a red-head, but her sweat smells unmistakably of red-heads. 'Who?'

'A young kid. She wouldn't tell me her name or what she wanted. She says she has to see you personally.'

'Which room?'

There are two waiting-rooms, the big one and the little one, as we call them, and I knew my secretary was going to reply:

'The little one.'

She doesn't like women who insist on speaking to me personally.

I still had my briefcase under my arm, my hat on my head, my wet overcoat on my shoulders, when I pushed open the door and saw her leaning back in an armchair, legs crossed, reading a film magazine and smoking a cigarette.

Immediately she jumped to her feet and looked at me just as she would have looked, in flesh and blood, at the actor on the cover of the magazine.

'Come in here.'

I had noted her cheap coat, the run-down heels of her shoes and especially her hair done in a pony-tail like a dancer or one of the Left Bank girls.

In my office, I took off my things and sat down, motioning her to the armchair opposite me.

Then I asked, 'Did someone send you here?'

'No. I came on my own.'

'What made you come to me rather than to some other lawyer?'

I often ask this question, although the reply isn't always flattering to my self-esteem.

'Can't you guess?'

'I don't play guessing games.'

'Let's say because you usually get your clients off.'

A journalist put the same thing differently not long ago and since then it's gone from newspaper to newspaper:

'If you're innocent, take any good lawyer. If you're guilty, get in touch with Maitre Gobillot.'

My visitor's face was harshly lighted by the lamp trained on the confessional chair, and I remembered my distress when I analysed it, for it was a child's face and a very old face at the same time, a mixture of *naiveté* and deceit; of innocence and vice, I would like to add, except that I don't like those words, which I reserve for juries.

She was thin, physically run down, like girls of her age who live unhealthy lives in Paris. What made me think she probably had dirty feet?

'Is there a charge against you?'

'There's certainly going to be.'

She liked surprising me and I'm sure she purposely exposed her legs above the knees as she crossed them. Her make-up, which she had touched

up while she was waiting for me, was exaggerated and clumsy, like that of fifth-rate prostitutes or those little servant girls who have just arrived in Paris.

'As soon as I get back to my hotel, if I go back, I shall be arrested, and probably all the police in the streets have my description by now.'

'You wanted to see me *first*?'

'Of course! It'll be too late afterwards.'

I didn't understand and I was beginning to be intrigued. No doubt that's what she wanted, and I caught a furtive smile on her thin lips.

I started in at random:

'I suppose you're innocent?'

She had read those items about me, because she retorted:

'If I was innocent, I wouldn't be here.'

'What are you wanted for?'

'Hold-up.'

She said it simply, dryly.

'You've committed armed assault?'

'That's what they call a hold-up, isn't it?'

Then I settled down in my armchair, assuming my familiar pose, chin in my left hand, my right hand tracing words and arabesques on a pad, my head slightly tilted, my big vague eyes fixed on her.

'Tell me.'

'What?'

'Everything.'

'I'm nineteen.'

'I would have said seventeen.'

I was provoking her deliberately, yet I don't know why. I might say that at our very first contact a kind of antagonism had sprung up between us. She was defying me and I was defying her. Maybe at that moment our chances still seemed even.

'I was born in Lyons.'

'Go on.'

'My mother is neither a housewife nor a factory worker nor a prostitute.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Because that's usually the case, isn't it?'

'Do you read trashy novels?'

'Only the newspapers. My father's a schoolteacher, and before she got married my mother worked in the Post Office.'

She seemed to be expecting a reply which didn't come, and this put her off for a moment.

'I went to school until I was sixteen, I got my school certificate and I worked as a typist for a year, in Lyons, with a road transport firm.'

I had decided on silence.

'One day I made up my mind to try my luck in Paris and I convinced my parents I had found a job by letter.'

I was still not speaking.

'Doesn't this interest you?'

'Go on.'

'I came here, without a job, and I got along, since I'm still alive. Don't you want to ask how I got along?'

'No.'

'I'll tell you just the same. Doing all kinds of things. Anything at all.'

I didn't move a muscle and she insisted:

'All kinds! Understand?'

'Go on.'

'I met Noémie, who's got herself pinched somewhere or other. They're probably interrogating her right now. Since they know there were two of us in the hold-up and they'll find out, if they haven't already, that we share a room together at the hotel, they'll be waiting for me. Do you know the Hotel Alberti in the Rue Vavin?'

'No.'

'That's where it is.'

My attitude was beginning to get on her nerves and even to embarrass her. For my part, I was deliberately trying to look more stolid, more indifferent.

'Are you always like this?' she demanded resentfully. 'I thought your job was to help your clients.'

'Provided I know how I can help them.'

'To get the two of us off, damn it!'

'I'm listening.'

She hesitated, shrugged her shoulders, went on:

'All right. I'll try. In the end we got fed up, both of us.'

'What with?'

'Do you want me to spell it out for you? I don't mind, and if you enjoy dirty stories . . .'

There was scorn and disillusionment in her voice, and for the first time I encouraged her, feeling rather bad about having been even harsher than usual.

'Whose idea was the hold-up?'

'Mine. Noémie's too stupid to have an idea. She's a good kid but not very bright. While I was reading the papers I got the notion that with a bit of luck we could set ourselves up for weeks or maybe months with one single job. At night I'm often on the streets around the Gare Montparnasse and I'm getting to know that district pretty well. On the corner of the Rue de l'Abbe-Gregoire, I've noticed a watchmaker's shop that's open every night till nine or ten.

'It's a narrow shop, badly lighted. At the back you can see a kitchen where an old woman knits or peels her vegetables while she listens to the radio.

'The watchmaker, who is as old as she is and bald-headed, works close to the shop window, with a black-rimmed magnifying-glass in his eye, and I took to walking past their shop often, on purpose, so as to watch them. That stretch of the street is badly lighted, with no shops near by . . .'

'You were armed?'

'I bought one of those toy revolvers that look exactly like a real one.'

'This happened last night?'

'The night before last. Wednesday.'

'Go on.'

'A little after nine, the two of us went into the shop, and Noémie pretended her watch needed repairing. I was standing beside her and I got a bit worried when I didn't see the old woman in the kitchen. I almost gave the whole thing up on account of that, and then, just as the man was bending down to look at my friend's watch, I showed him the tip of the gun and said:

' "This is a hold-up. Don't call out. Give me your money and you won't get hurt."

'He could tell I wasn't fooling and opened the till, while Noémie, as we had planned, was grabbing the watches hanging beside his workbench and stuffing them in her coat pockets.

'I was just about to stick out my hand to take the money, when I felt someone was behind me. It was the old woman, in her coat and hat, on her way back from Lord knows where, and she was standing on the doorstep and starting to scream for help.

'She didn't seem scared of my revolver and she was blocking the way, with her arms stretched out, and yelling:

' "Thief! Help! Murder!"

'That's when I noticed the handle they use to raise and lower the iron shutter, and I grabbed it and threw myself on the old woman, shouting to Noémie:

' "Let's get out of here fast!"

'As I pushed the old woman aside, I hit her and she fell backwards on to the pavement and we had to step over her. We ran off in opposite directions.

'We had agreed to meet in a bar on the Rue de la Gaite if we had to separate, but I doubled back on my tracks for more than an hour. I even took the underground all the way to the Chatelet before going to the bar. I asked Gaston:

' "Hasn't my girl friend been in?"

' "I haven't seen her this evening," he answered.

'I spent part of the night out and when it was getting light I went back to the Hotel Alberti but I didn't find Noémie there. I haven't seen her since. In yesterday morning's paper there were a few lines about it, saying that the jeweller's wife had been taken to hospital with injuries to her forehead and one eye.

'They don't say anything else. They don't mention us, either last night or this morning. They don't say the job was done by two women either.

'I don't like it. I didn't go back to the Hotel Alberti last night, and about noon, on my way to the bar in the Rue de la Gaite, I spotted two plain-clothes cops just in time.

'I kept on walking, turning my head away. From a bistro in the Rue de Rennes, where they don't know me, I rang up Gaston.'

I was listening, still motionless, without letting her see the signs of interest she had counted on.

'Apparently they showed him a photo of Noémie, one of the kind they take of people who've been arrested, and asked him if he knew her. He said he did. Then they wanted to know if he knew her girl friend and he said he did, but he didn't know where either of us lived. They must have done the

same thing in all the bars around there and in the hotels too, no doubt. I asked Gaston, who's a pal, to do me a favour and he agreed.'

She looked at me as if all I had to do now was understand.

'I'm waiting,' I said, still coldly.

I don't know exactly what I resented in her, but I resented something.

'When they question him again, what's going to happen is that he'll say we were both in his bar on Thursday evening at the time of the hold-up and he'll find customers who'll identify us. Noémie doesn't know that, and she's simply got to be told. If I know her, she's probably kept her mouth shut and looked at them with her pig-headed expression. Now that you're our lawyer, you'll be allowed to go and see her and tell her what to say. You'll be able to straighten out the details with Gaston, too; you'll find him at his bar until two in the morning. I've told him on the phone. I can't offer you money just now, because I haven't got any, but I know you've sometimes taken cases free.'

I thought I knew everything, had seen everything, heard everything.

I felt that she was hesitant about finishing, that she hadn't come to the end yet, that she still had something to say or do which suddenly seemed difficult. Was she afraid of messing up this deal, which she must have planned as minutely as the hold-up?

I can see her now getting to her feet, trying to smile confidently and play her big scene sensationally. Her glance swept the room, stopped at the only corner of my desk that wasn't deep in papers, and then, pulling up her skirt to her waist, she lay back, whispering:

'As much as you want before they put me in jail.'

She wore no pants. That was the first time I saw her thin thighs, her rounded, childish belly, the dark triangle below it, and for no precise reason the blood rushed to my head.

I could see her face upside down, near the lamp and the vase of flowers which Bordenave renews every morning, and she was trying to see me, too; she was waiting, and, as she felt that I still hadn't moved, bit by bit losing confidence in her fate.

It took a little time for those eyes to fill with water, for her to sniff, then, at last, for her hand to fumble for the hem of her skirt which she still didn't pull down, asking in a disappointed, humiliated voice:

'It doesn't appeal to you?'

She got up slowly, turning her back to me, and it was still without showing her face that she asked, resignedly:

'Is it no to everything?'

I lit a cigarette. Now it was my turn to answer, looking away:

'Sit down.'

She didn't do so at once, and before turning towards me she blew her nose noisily, as children do.

It was she whom I telephoned just now in the Rue de Ponthieu, where there was a man in her bed, a man I know, whom I practically asked to become her lover.

* * *

The telephone bell rang just when I didn't know if I would go on writing today. I recognized my wife's voice.

'Still working?'

I hesitated.

'No.'

'Aren't you coming for me? Moriat's here. If you come, Corine wants us to stay for dinner with four or five friends.'

I agreed.

So I'm going to lock 'my' dossier up in the cupboard, and behind some books in the library I shall hide the key, then I'll go upstairs and dress.

Is the tramp couple still stretched out under the Pont-Marie?

II

Tuesday, November 6, evening

I WENT up to my room to change and I called Albert.

'Get the car out to take me to the Rue Saint-Dominique. I suppose Madame took the little car?'

'Yes, sir.'

We have two cars and a chauffeur-manservant, but it's mostly the chauffeur that causes talk. He is put down to the slightly naive vanity of a

self-made man, when actually I engaged him for a rather silly reason.

If I had a client in front of me telling me all this, I would no doubt interrupt him with: *'Stick to the facts'*

And yet, while I'm at it, I want to explode a legend. Maitre Andrieu, under whom I started, and, incidentally, the only man I ever devilled for, who was also Viviane's first husband, was one of the few Paris lawyers to be driven to the Palais by a liveried chauffeur. That suggests that I want to imitate him, that some complex or other compels me to prove to my wife . .

When we were getting started, while we were living on the Place Denfert-Rochereau, with the Lion de Belfort just under our windows. I used to take the metro. That didn't last long, about a year, and after that I could afford taxis. We lost no time in buying a second-hand car, and, while Viviane had a driver's licence, I wasn't capable of passing the test. I lack all mechanical sense, maybe the reflexes too. I'm so tense at the wheel, so sure of inevitable disaster, that the examiner advised me:

'It would be better to give up, Maitre Gobillot. You're not the only man like this and they're nearly always people of more than average intelligence. If you take it over again two or three times, you'll finally get through, but sooner or later you'll have an accident. It's not your line.'

I remember the respect he put into these last words, for I was beginning to make a name for myself.

For several years, until we moved to the Île Saint-Louis, Viviane served as my chauffeur, driving me to the Palais and waiting for me in the evening, and it wasn't until Albert, the son of our gardener at Sully, was looking for a job, after his military service, that we thought of taking him on.

Our life had grown more complicated, and each of us had more obligations to meet.

People found it strange that we weren't inseparable any more, my wife and I, because it had become a sort of legend, and I'm sure that even now certain people think Viviane helps me prepare my briefs, if not my speeches in court.

I'm not proud in the sense my colleagues mean, and if. . .

'Facts!'

Why have I gone back to last Sunday evening, which wasn't singled out by any important event? Today's Tuesday. I didn't think I would want to immerse myself in my dossier again so soon.

So Albert drove me to the Rue Saint-Dominique, where I saw my wife's blue car in the courtyard, and I told Albert not to wait. At Corine de Langelle's I found about ten people in one of the drawing-rooms and three or four in the little circular room fixed up as a bar where the hostess was presiding in person.

'Scotch, Lucien?' she asked me before we exchanged a kiss.

She kisses everyone. In her house it's a ritual.

Then, almost immediately:

'What monster of cruelty is our eminent lawyer snatching from the clutches of Justice this time?'

Jean Moriat was there, in an enormous armchair, talking to Viviane, and I shook hands with the regular guests: Lannier, the owner of three or four newspapers, the deputy Druelle, a young man whose name I always forget and whose occupation I don't know except that he's always to be found where Corine is—*one of my protégés*, she calls him—two or three good-looking women over forty, which is normal for the Rue Saint-Dominique.

Nothing happened, as I've said, except what usually happens at this kind of party. We went on drinking and chatting until about eight-thirty, and by that time there was only a group of five or six left, as Viviane had said there would be, including Lannier and, of course, Jean Moriat.

It's on account of him that I come back to this, because on two or three separate occasions our eyes met and I got the impression, mistakenly perhaps, though I don't think so, that some kind of exchange took place between us.

Everyone knows Moriat, who has been a member of the cabinet ten times at least, and premier twice, and will be again. Photographs and caricatures of him appear on the front page of the papers as regularly as those of film stars.

He is a thick-set, stocky man, almost as ugly as I am, but he has the advantage of height, which I lack, and of a certain peasant toughness which gives him an air of nobility.

His life, too, is more or less an open secret, at least to those Parisians who call themselves insiders.

At forty-two, married and father of three children, he was still a veterinary surgeon at Niort and seemed to have no further ambitions when, after an electoral scandal, he ran for parliament and was elected.

He would probably have spent the rest of his life as a conscientious deputy, shuttling back and forth between a shabby apartment on the Left Bank and his constituency, if Corine hadn't met him. How old was she then? It's difficult to talk about Corine's age. Judging by the way she looks today, she must have been about thirty. Her husband, the old Comte de Langelles, had died two years earlier, and she was beginning to drift away from the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where she had lived with him, into a milieu of newspaper publishers and politicians.

They say that there was nothing casual about her choice of Moriat and that her emotions had nothing to do with it, that she had tried two or three other men first and discarded them, and that she had her eye on the deputy for Niort for a long time before making him her choice.

Anyhow he was seen at her house more and more frequently, went back to Deux-Sèvres less regularly, and two years later was already a junior minister, being appointed to the cabinet shortly afterwards.

This is all more than fifteen years ago, almost twenty, I'm not bothering to check the dates which aren't important, and today their liaison is an accepted thing, semi-official since it's to the Rue Saint-Dominique that the prime minister, for example, or even the President, telephones when Moriat is needed.

He didn't break with his wife, who lives in Paris somewhere around the Champs-de-Mars. I've met her several times: she's still awkward, self-effacing, and she always seems to be apologizing for being so unworthy of the great man. Their children are married, and I think the eldest is in local government.

At Corine's, Moriat doesn't pose for the benefit of his constituents or posterity. He shows himself as he is, and he often looks to me like a man who is bored or more precisely a man who is trying to come up to expectations.

On Sunday, the first time our eyes met, he was watching me and wrinkling his brow as if he was discovering in me a new element, something I'm tempted to call a sign.

I wouldn't like to repeat aloud what I'm about to write, out of shame and for fear of being ridiculous, but that Sunday I began to believe in the sign, an invisible mark that can only be discerned by the initiated, by those who bear it themselves.

Am I going to think this through to the end? Only special people can have that sign, people who have lived a lot, seen a lot, tried everything for themselves, above all, people who have made an abnormal effort, reached or almost reached their goal, and I don't think you can acquire it under a certain age, the middle forties, say.

I for my part was watching Moriat, first during dinner, while the women were telling stories, then in the drawing-room where the mistress of the newspaper proprietor had sat down on some cushions and was singing, accompanying herself on her guitar.

He wasn't enjoying himself any more than I was, that was obvious. As he looked about him, he must have been wondering what trick of fate had placed him in a setting which was in a way an insult to his personality.

He is supposed to be ambitious. He has his legend, just as I have mine, and he's said to be as formidable in politics as I am in court.

Yet I don't think he is ambitious, or else, if he once was, in a pretty childish way, he isn't any more. He submits to his fate, his personality, just as some actors are condemned to play the same role all their lives.

I watched him take drink after drink, without pleasure, without getting any kick out of them, and yet not like an alcoholic either, and I'm convinced that every time he asked for more liquor it was to nerve himself to stay.

Corine, who is almost fifteen years younger than he, looks after him like a baby, sees that everything he wants is right there.

Last Sunday, she, too, who knows him better than anyone else, must have been watching his lassitude, his apathy, increase as the evening advanced.

I haven't yet started drinking. I hardly ever do and never in that systematic way.

All the same Moriat had recognized the sign in me; it must lie in the eyes; perhaps it is nothing but a certain heaviness in the glance, a certain vacuity rather than any special facial expression.

We were talking politics, and he came out with a few sarcastic phrases, as one might throw crumbs to the birds. At that moment I left the drawing-room to go into a boudoir where I knew there was a telephone. I rang the Rue de Ponthieu first, where, as I expected, there was no reply. Then I dialled the number of Louis', the Italian restaurant where Yvette usually eats.

'Gobillot speaking. Is Yvette there, Louis?'

'She's just come in, Monsieur Gobillot. Do you want me to call her?'

I added, because I had to, and because Louis knows:

'Is she alone?'

'Yes. She's just started dinner at the small table in the back.'

'Tell her I'll drop in in half an hour, perhaps a little later.'

Has Moriat guessed this drama too? Neither of us is a vicious man, any more than we're ambitious, but who would admit this apart from the few who bear the sign themselves? He watched me again when I came back into the drawing-room, but his eyes were bleary and moist, as they always are after a certain number of drinks.

I suppose Corine made some signal to him, for there is the same understanding between them as between Viviane and me. The ex-premier, who one of these days will once again direct the destinies of the country, got up laboriously, made a gesture of benediction and murmured:

'You'll excuse me . . .'

He crossed the drawing-room with an unsteady, heavy tread, and through the glass door I caught sight of a footman waiting for him, no doubt to put him to bed.

'He works so hard!' sighed Corine. 'He carries such a load of responsibilities on his shoulders!'

Viviane, too, gave me a knowing look, and hers contained a question. She had understood that I had gone to make a phone call. She knew to whom, why, and she was aware that I would end up by going there; I think she was even silently advising me to.

The evening would drag on for an hour or two before the goodbye kisses.

'I'll have to ask you to excuse me. I've got work waiting for me too. . . .'

Were they taken in? Probably not, any more than by Moriat. It doesn't matter.

'Did you keep the car?' Viviane asked.

'No. I'll take a taxi.'

'Wouldn't you like me to drop you?'

'Of course not. There's a cab rank just across the street.'

Once I'm out of sight, will she talk about my work and my responsibilities? I had to wait for a taxi in the rain for ten minutes, because it's Sunday, and when I got to Louis' Yvette was smoking a cigarette with her coffee, almost alone in the restaurant, looking vacant.

She made room for me on the bench, offered me her cheek with a movement which has grown as familiar as Corine's kisses.

'Did you have dinner out?' she asked simply, as if our relationship were just like everybody else's.

'I had a bite at the Rue Saint-Dominique.'

'Was your wife there?'

'Yes.'

She isn't jealous of Viviane, doesn't want to take her place, doesn't want anything, in fact, being content to live in the present.

'What will you have, Maitre?'

I looked at Yvette's cup and said:

'Coffee.'

She remarked:

'It'll keep you awake.'

That's right. In the end I'll have to take a sleeping-tablet, as I do almost every night. I have nothing to say to her, and we sit side by side on the bench, staring in front of us like an old couple.

Yet I do eventually ask:

'Tired?'

She says no, without seeing any harm in the question, then it's her turn to ask:

'How did you spend your day?'

'I worked.'

I don't say what exactly I worked on this afternoon, and she is far from suspecting that it was chiefly to do with her.

'Is your wife waiting for you?'

This is an indirect way of finding out about my intentions.

'No.'

'Shall we go home?'

I nod. I would like to be able to say no, to go away, but I gave up this losing battle long ago.

'Do you mind if I have a chartreuse?'

'If you like. Louis! One chartreuse.'

'Nothing for you, Monsieur Gobillot?'

'Nothing, thanks.'

The cleaning-woman at the Rue de Pontheiu doesn't come on Sundays, and I'm sure Yvette hasn't bothered to tidy up the flat. Has she even made the bed? Probably not. She drinks her chartreuse slowly, with long pauses between sips, as if putting off the moment for leaving. At last she whispers:

'Will you ask for the bill?'

Louis is used to seeing us at this table and knows where we're going when we leave his place.

'Good night, mademoiselle. Good night, Maitre.'

She takes my arm in the rain, and her heels, which are too high, sometimes make her stumble. It's just round the corner.

* * *

It is imperative that I go back to our first meeting, that Friday night, just over a year ago, in my office. While she was sitting down again, intimidated, wondering what I had decided, I picked up the house telephone to speak to my wife.

'I'm in my office, where I've got some work that will take an hour or two. Go to dinner without me and make my excuses to the commissioner and our friends. Tell them, and I really mean it, that I hope to be there in time for coffee.'

Without looking at my visitor, I walked towards the door, telling her crossly:

'Stay there.'

I even added, perhaps to provoke her, as one might say to a naughty child:

'Don't touch anything.'

I went out to Bordenave in her office.

'I want you to go downstairs and make sure that the person in my office hasn't been followed.'

'The police?'

'Yes. You can tell me on the telephone.'

In my office, I walked back and forth, my hands behind my back, while Yvette watched me pacing up and down.

'This Gaston,' I finally asked, 'has he got a police record?'

'I don't think so. He's never mentioned one.'

'Do you know him well?'

'Pretty well.'

'You've slept together?'

'Occasionally.'

'Is your friend Noémie of age?'

'She's just turned twenty.'

'What does she do?'

'The same as me.'

'Has she never had a job?'

'She used to help her mother in the shop. Her mother sells vegetables in the Rue du Chemin-Vert.'

'She ran away from home?'

'She left, saying she'd had enough.'

'Long ago?'

'Two years.'

'Didn't her mother try to find her?'

'No. She doesn't care. Every now and then, when she's completely broke, Noémie goes to see her. They have a row, bawl each other out, but in the end her mother always gives her a little money.'

'She's never been arrested?'

'Noémie? Twice. Possibly more, but she told me twice.'

'What charge?'

'Soliciting. Both times they let her go the next day after giving her a medical check-up.'

'What about you?'

'Not so far.'

The telephone rang. It was Bordenave.

'I didn't see anyone, sir.'

'Thanks. I won't need you any more tonight.'

'You don't want me to wait?'

'No.'

'Good night.'

I simply must get down to the why and I'm all the more embarrassed because I would like to get at the absolute truth. Not two or three pieces of truth which form a whole that is satisfactory in appearance but inevitably false.

I felt no desire for Yvette that evening, nor pity for her. In my career I've come across too many specimens of her kind, and even if there was something excessive in her which made her slightly different, she was still no novelty to me.

Did I fall for the boost to my ego, flattered by the confidence she placed in me even before she met me?

In all sincerity I don't think so. I believe it's more complicated, and a Moriat, for instance, would have been capable of a decision of that sort.

Why not interpret my action as a protest and a challenge? I had already been forced to go far, much too far, in a direction foreign to my temperament and my tastes. My reputation was established, and I was trying to face up to it squarely, that reputation which accounted for this kid's visit and her cynical proposition.

On the professional level, I had never taken a risk on this scale, nor had I ever got involved in such a difficult not to say impossible, case.

I took up the challenge. I am convinced that this is the truth, and for a year now I've had plenty of time to question myself on that point.

I wasn't concerned with Yvette Maudet, delinquent daughter of a Lyons school-teacher and a former Post Office employee, but with a problem which I was suddenly undertaking to solve.

I had sat down again and was taking notes, while asking precise questions.

'You went back to your hotel on the night of Wednesday to Thursday, but you didn't set foot there last night. The manager knows that and will notify the police.'

'It happens at least twice a week that I don't sleep at the Rue Vavin, because they won't let us take men upstairs.'

'They'll ask you where you did sleep?'

'I'll tell them.'

'Where?'

'In a hotel in the Rue de Berry, which has only rooms for that.'

'Do they know you there?'

'Yes. Noémie and I change our beat often. Sometimes we work as far down as Saint-Germain-des-Pres, other times we go to the Champs-Élysées, from time to time even Montmartre.'

'Did the jeweller see both of you?'

'It wasn't very light in the shop and he looked at us the way you look at a customer, he bent over the watch right away.'

'Your pony-tail is noticeable.'

'He didn't see it, neither did his wife, for the good reason that I'd crammed it under a beret.'

'Ready for what happened?'

'Just in case.'

I questioned her like this for almost an hour and I phoned the assistant of one of my friends at his home.

'Is the case of the jeweller in the Rue de l'Abbe-Gregoire in the hands of an examining magistrate?'

'Are you interested in the girl? Police Headquarters still have charge of her for some reason, I don't know why.'

'Thank you.'

I said to Yvette:

'You're to go back to the Rue Vavin as if nothing were wrong and you're to go with the police without protest, avoiding any mention of me.'

I joined my wife and our friends about ten o'clock on the Avenue du President Roosevelt, and they were only just starting on the pheasant. I talked about the case to the commissioner, giving him to understand that I would probably take it on, and the next morning I went over to the Quai des Orfevres.

The case made quite a stir, far too much, and little Duret was more useful to me than ever. I don't know how he'll end up. He's a boy I can't quite fathom. His father, a big company director, suffered business setbacks. While still a law student, Duret used to hang around newspaper offices, placing an item here and there, getting to know some of the seamy sides of Paris life.

Before him I had a colleague called Auber who was beginning to feel that he could fly with his own wings. Duret got to know of it and applied for his job, even before being called to the Bar.

He's been with me for four years now, always respectful, yet, when I give him certain jobs, and even at other times, he has a look that's more amused than ironical.

It was he who went to see this famous Gaston in his bar on the Rue de la Gaité and told me, when he got back, that he could be trusted. It was he, again, who, with the help of a reporter friend of his, discovered those details in the jeweller's life that gave unexpected colour to the trial.

The case could have been handled in the magistrate's court. I insisted on its being brought before a jury. The jeweller's wife, who hadn't died, was still wearing a black patch over one eye which they no longer had any hope of saving.

The hearing was stormy, with numerous threats on the part of the presiding judge to have the court cleared. None of my colleagues, not one single magistrate, had any illusions about it. For all of them Yvette Maudet and Noémie Brand were guilty of the unsuccessful hold-up in the Rue de

l'Abbe-Gregoire. The question that arose, the one that made the headlines, was:

Will Maltre Gobillot obtain an acquittal ?

At the end of the second hearing, this appeared impossible, and even my wife had no confidence. She's never admitted it to me, but I know she thought I had gone too far and it embarrassed her.

A lot of dirt came up in the course of the arguments and occasionally one of the spectators would shout:

'That's enough!'

Some of my colleagues hesitated—a few still hesitate—to shake hands with me, and I have never been so close to expulsion from the Bar.

This trial, more than any other, made me understand the excitement of an election campaign or a big political manoeuvre, with all the limelight trained on you, the necessity of winning at any price, whatever the means.

My witnesses were dubious characters, but not one of them had a conviction against him; not one of them contradicted himself either or hesitated for a second.

I paraded before the court twenty Montparnasse prostitutes more or less resembling Yvette and Noémie, who testified under oath that the old jeweller, who had been presented by the public prosecutor as the prototype of the honest artisan, went in quite a bit for exhibitionism and used to entice girls into his shop in his wife's absence.

It was true. I owed the discovery to Duret, who himself had it from an informer who telephoned me repeatedly but wouldn't give his name. Not only did that put a new face on one of my opponents, but I was able to establish that the latter had on several occasions bought stolen jewels.

Was he aware that they were stolen? I don't know, and it's not my business.

Why, on that evening, when his wife happened to be out—she had gone to see her pregnant daughter-in-law in the Rue du Cherche-Midi —why, I say, shouldn't the jeweller have seized his chance of inviting in, as he had done before, two street girls, who had turned the situation to their own account?

I didn't try to draw a flattering picture of my clients. On the contrary, I made them out worse than they were, and that was my smartest trick.

I made them admit that they would perhaps have done the job if they had had the chance, but that they didn't since they were in Gaston's bar at the

time.

I can see them now, during the three days the trial lasted, the bald-headed jeweller and his wife with the black patch over her eye, sitting side by side in the front row; I can see their growing mystification, their indignation, which reached such a paroxysm that in the end, dumbfounded, they didn't know where to turn their eyes any more.

Those two will never understand what happened to them, nor why I relentlessly set out, with such cruelty, to destroy the image they had of themselves. Even now, I'm sure that they haven't got over it, that they will never again feel the way they used to, and I wonder if the old woman, blind in one eye from now on, whose hair is growing again on the half of her skull laid bare by the blow, still dares to go and see her daughter-in-law in the Rue du Cherche-Midi.

We have never talked about it, Viviane and I. She was standing in the corridor at the moment of the verdict, which was greeted by boos, and when I came out of the court, my gown flying, not wanting to say anything to the press reporters crowding around me, she did nothing but follow me in silence.

She knows it is her fault. She has understood. I'm not sure that she wasn't frightened at seeing me go so far, but she admires me for it.

Did she also foresee how it would end? Probably. It is our habit, after trials which produce a high degree of nervous tension, to go and dine together in some cabaret and to stay out part of the night so as to relax. That's what we did that evening, and everywhere we went we were looked at with curiosity; we were more than ever the couple of wild creatures in the legend.

Viviane really showed pluck. Never faltered for a second. She's three years older than I, which means she's approaching fifty, but, dressed up and ready for the fray, she's still prettier and attracts more attention than plenty of women of thirty. Her eyes, especially, have a brilliance, a vivacity, that I've seen only in her, and there is a mocking gaiety in her smile which makes her someone to be reckoned with.

People call her a bitch, and she isn't one. She's herself, goes her own way, as Corine goes hers, indifferent to rumours, not giving a damn whether she's liked or detested, trading smile for smile and blow for blow. The difference between her and Corine is that Corine is outwardly soft and sweet, while Viviane, all nerves, possesses an aggressive vitality which never fails.

'Where is she now?' she asked me, about two o'clock in the morning.

I noted that the 'she' was singular, so Viviane had never regarded Noémie as anything but an extra. At the Palais, no one was in any doubt either, for poor Noémie, with her big shapeless body, her bovine eyes, her obstinate forehead, can't fool anyone.

'In a little hotel on the Boulevard Saint-Michel. I wanted her to go back to the Rue Vavin to brazen it out, but the manager insists his place is full.'

Did it occur to her that the Boulevard Saint-Michel is just round the corner from us and quite close to the Palais? I have no doubt it did. And yet I didn't do it on purpose.

During the time which elapsed between Yvette's arrest and her acquittal, I realized that I would not get rid of her, nor of the image of her naked belly as I had seen it in my office.

Why? Even now I still haven't found the answer. I'm not a vicious man, nor a sexual maniac. Viviane's never shown jealousy and I've had the affairs I've wanted, almost all of them without future, many of them without pleasure.

Also, I've seen too many girls of all kinds to get sentimental, like some men of my age, about a kid who went wrong, and Yvette's cynicism doesn't impress me any more than what is left of her innocence.

During the preliminary investigation, I went to see her in the Petite Roquette without once departing from a strictly professional attitude.

Yet my wife knew even then.

Yvette too.

What surprises me most is that Yvette was clever enough not to show it. We were face to face as lawyer and client. We were preparing her replies to the magistrate. Even in what concerned her case, I wasn't telling her any more than necessary about my discoveries.

The night of the acquittal, about four in the morning, leaving the last cabaret and getting behind the wheel, my wife suggested naturally:

'Aren't you going to see her?'

I had been thinking about it since the beginning of the evening, but I was refusing, out of pride, out of self-respect, to yield to the temptation. Wasn't it ridiculous, or hateful, to rush to her, the very first night, to claim my reward?

Was the desire I felt for her so violent that it could be read in my face?

I didn't answer. My wife drove down the Rue de Clichy, crossed the Grands Boulevards, and I knew she wasn't heading for the Île Saint-Louis but for the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

'What did you do with the other one?' she asked again, sure that I'd got rid of her.

I had strongly advised Noémie, for a time at least, to go home and live with her mother.

I would like to avoid a misunderstanding. When I speak of my wife as I am doing at this moment, it might seem that there was in her attitude a certain provocation, that she pushed me, in some way, into Yvette's arms.

Nothing is further from the truth. I am certain, although she will never admit it, that Viviane is jealous, that my affairs made her suffer, or at least worried her. Only she's a good sport and looks truth in the face, accepting in advance what she is powerless to prevent.

We passed the dark mass of the Palais de Justice, and on the Boulevard Saint-Michel she murmured:

'Farther up?'

'On the corner of the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince. The entrance is on the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince.'

I was still hesitating, humiliated, when she stopped the car.

'Good night,' she said, half under her breath.

And she kissed me, as she does every night.

Alone on the pavement, I found my eyes were wet and I began to wave to call her back, but the car was already turning the corner of the Rue Soufflot.

The hotel was dark, with nothing but a faint glow behind the frosted glass of the door. The night porter opened it for me, muttered that there were no vacancies and slipping a tip into his hand, I stated that someone was expecting me in number 37.

It was true. Nothing had been agreed on. Yvette was asleep. But she wasn't surprised when I knocked at the door.

'Just a minute.'

I heard the click of the light switch, then her bare footsteps back and forth on the floor, and she opened the door, still pulling on a dressing gown.

'What time is it?'

'Half-past four.'

That seemed to surprise her, as though she were wondering what had kept me so long.

'Give me your hat and coat.'

The room was narrow, the brass bed had been slept in, and some underclothes were trailing out of an open suitcase on the floor.

'Don't pay any attention to the mess. I went to bed as soon as I got in.'

Her breath smelled of alcohol, but she wasn't drunk. What did I look like, myself, fully dressed, in the middle of the room?

'Don't you want to come to bed?'

The most difficult thing was to undress. I didn't want to. I didn't want anything more, and I didn't have the courage to leave either.

'Come here,' I ordered.

She came to me, her face turned up, thinking I was going to kiss her, but all I did was hold her to me without touching her lips, then, suddenly, I slipped off her dressing-gown, beneath which she was completely naked.

With a brutal movement, I threw her down on the edge of the bed and dropped on top of her while she stared at the ceiling. I had begun to take her, savagely, as though getting my revenge, when I saw her watching me with astonishment.

'What's the matter with you?' she whispered, using *tu* to me for the first time.

'Nothing!'

What was the matter with me was that I couldn't do anything, that I was getting up, ashamed, stammering:

'Forgive me.'

Then she said:

'You've thought about it too much.'

That could have been the explanation, but it wasn't. On the contrary, I had refused to think about it. I knew, but I wasn't thinking about it. Anyhow, it's happened with other women before her.

'Get undressed and come and lie down by me. I'm cold.'

Was I obliged to? Would the future have been different if I had said no. If I had gone away? I don't know.

Did she, for her part, know what she was doing, when, a little later, she stretched out her arm to put the light out and snuggled up against me? I could feel her, thin and alive against my body, and little by little, with hesitations and pauses, as if trying not to frighten me, taking possession of me.

We were still not asleep when an alarm clock went off in one of the rooms, nor when, later, some of the hotel residents began to move about behind the thin walls.

'It's too bad I haven't got any means of making coffee for you. I'll have to buy a spirit-lamp.'

Daylight was coming through the blind when I left at seven o'clock. I stopped in a bistro on the Boulevard Saint-Michel to drink a cup of coffee and I looked at myself in the mirror behind the coffee machine.

At the Quai d'Anjou I didn't go up to the bedroom, but settled down in the office, where, by eight o'clock, the telephone began to ring, as it always does. Bordenave would be in soon, bringing me the morning papers, whose headlines could be summed up by:

Maitre Gobillot Wins

As if it were a sports contest.

'Are you pleased ?'

Did my secretary suspect that I wasn't proud of this victory? She is more devoted to me than anyone else in the world, including Viviane, and if I committed an act ignoble enough for everyone to reject me, she would probably be the only one who wouldn't abandon me.

She is thirty-five. She was nineteen when she began to work for me and she's never been known to have an affair. My various assistants unanimously maintain, as my wife does, that she's still a virgin.

Not only have I never flirted with her, but for no reason at all I'm more impatient, harsher, with her than with anyone else, often unjustly, and I've lost count of the times I've made her cry because she couldn't lay her hand fast enough on a file which I myself had misplaced.

Does she realize that I've come straight from Yvette's bed and that my skin is still impregnated with her acid smell ? She will know one of these days, because, as my closest collaborator, there's nothing she doesn't know about my actions and movements.

Will she cry, alone in her office? Is she jealous? Is she in love with me and, if so, what kind of man does she think I am?

My first appointment was for ten o'clock and I had time to take a bath and change. I didn't wake Viviane, who was still asleep, and I didn't see her again until evening, because I had to have lunch that day at the Cafe de Paris with a client whose case I was pleading in the afternoon.

This was a year ago.

I already knew Moriat at that time. We used to meet at Corine's, where we would often chat in a corner.

Before Yvette, why didn't Moriat look at me the way he looked at me last Sunday? Hadn't I got the sign then, or was it not yet visible enough?

III

Saturday, November 10

It is ten p.m. and I waited for my wife to go out before I went down to my office. She has gone with Corine and some women friends to the opening, in a gallery on the Rue Jacob, of the first exhibition of paintings by Marie-Lou, Lannier's mistress. There will be champagne, and the chances are that it will go on to the early hours of the morning.

To get out of it, I argued that there will be a hundred people in a place hardly bigger than an ordinary dining-room and that the heat will be unbearable.

It appears that Marie-Lou has real talent. She began painting two years ago, during a visit to Saint-Paul-de-Vence. She and Lannier live together in the Rue de la Faisanderie, but they're both married, Lannier to a cousin of his who is said to be very ugly and from whom he's been separated for twenty years, Marie-Lou to an industrialist from Lyons, Morilleux, a friend of Lannier's with whom he still has business dealings. As far as anyone knows, it was all amicably settled to everyone's satisfaction.

She and Lannier were at our house for dinner yesterday, together with a Belgian politician temporarily in Paris, a member of the Academy whom we often invite, and a South American ambassador accompanied by his wife.

Every week we have one or two dinners like this for eight or ten people, and Viviane, an excellent hostess, never gets tired of entertaining. The ambassador was not at our house by chance. It was Lannier who brought him to me, and when the time came for coffee and liqueurs, he dropped a word or two about what he intends to discuss with me in my office: a more

or less legal armament deal, if I understood certain hints correctly, in which he wants to engage for political reasons without getting into trouble with the French government.

He is a young man, thirty-five at the most, handsome and attractive, though with a tendency to fat, and his wife is one of the most beautiful creatures I have ever been privileged to admire. You can tell she is in love with her husband, she never takes her eyes off him, and she is so young, so fresh, that you would think she left her convent school last night.

What funny business is he going to get mixed up in? I'm still only guessing, but I have reason to think it's something to do with overthrowing the government of his own country, of which his father is one of the richest men. They have two children—they showed us photographs of them—and their embassy building is one of the most charming in the Bois de Boulogne.

I waited impatiently for them to leave, for I was anxious to get to the Rue de Ponthieu. I've spent three nights there this week and I'd go again today if Saturday were not 'his' day.

It is preferable not to think of it. When I came home in a taxi, at half-past six in the morning, when day had not yet completely broken, a violent storm was raging over the Paris region, where tiles have been blown off roofs, trees damaged, one in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. Viviane told me later that one of our shutters had been banging all night. However, it didn't blow down, and about noon some workmen came to repair it.

On entering my office, where I always stop before going upstairs to take my bath, my first thought was to look if I could see my tramp couple under the Pont-Marie. Until almost nine o'clock, nothing moved under the rags which the wind stirred. When at last a man came out from under them, the one I'm used to seeing, who, with his jacket that's too wide and too long, his hirsute beard, his battered hat, looks like a circus clown, I was surprised to realize that two more figures were still lying there. Has he picked up a second partner? Has a friend joined them?

The wind is still blowing, but more gustily, and cold is predicted for tomorrow, possibly even frost.

I have thought a great deal, in the course of the week, about what I've written so far, and I have realized that up to now I've spoken only about the man I am at present. I have attacked the veracity of two or three legends,

the most glaring ones. There are still some others I want to destroy, and for that I am obliged to go back much further.

For example, on account of my appearance it is generally believed, even by people who supposedly know me well, that I'm one of those men fresh from the country who, as they used to say in the last century, still have mud on their boots. That is the case with Jean Moriat, or almost so. It is, by the way, very advantageous in certain professions, including mine, because it inspires confidence, but I have to admit that so far as I'm concerned there is nothing in it.

I was born in Paris, in a maternity hospital in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, and my father, who spent almost all his life in the Rue Visconti, behind the French Academy, came from one of the oldest families in Rennes. There were de Gobillots in the Crusades, later we find a Gobillot who was a captain of musketeers, and others, more numerous, were gentlemen of the robe, several of them more or less illustrious members of the Parliament of Brittany.

I don't take the slightest pride in it. As for my mother, who was called Louise Finot, she was the daughter of a laundress in the Rue des Tournelles, and when my father got her with child she was hanging around the taverns on the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

It is unlikely that these antecedents explain my character, still less the choice I made of a certain way of life, inasmuch as one can speak of choice.

My grandfather Gobillot, in Rennes, still lived an upper middle class life and would have ended up as a President of the Tribunal if a stroke hadn't carried him off before he was fifty.

As for my father, who had come to Paris to study law, he stayed there all his life, in the same flat in the Rue Visconti, where, until his death quite recently, he was taken care of by old Pauline, who saw him born but who was actually only twelve years older than he.

At that time it was still customary to have little girls to mind the babies, and this one, who was no more than a child when my grandparents engaged her, followed my father until his death, forming with him a curious household.

Did my father disclaim all interest in me at birth? I don't know. I have never asked him, or Pauline either, Pauline who is still alive, who is today eighty-two, and whom I sometimes go to see. Even though she still does her own housework, in the Rue Visconti as always, she has almost entirely lost

her memory, except for the most distant events, the time when my father was a little boy in short trousers.

Perhaps he wasn't convinced that Louise Finot's child was his, or perhaps by then he had another mistress?

In any case, I spent my first two years in a foster home, out near Versailles, where, one fine day, my mother came for me to take me to the Rue Visconti.

'Here's your son, Blaise,' she must have announced.

She was pregnant again. She went on, as Pauline has often told me:

'I'm getting married next week. Prosper doesn't know a thing. If he found out I've already had a child, he might not marry me and I don't want to miss this chance because he's a good man, a hard worker who doesn't drink. I've come to give Lucien back to you.'

From that day on, I lived at the Rue Visconti, under the wing of Pauline, for whom, at the beginning, a child was such a mysterious creature that she hesitated to touch me.

My mother did in fact marry a salesman at Allez Freres; I caught a glimpse of him much later, wearing an ironmonger's grey apron, in the Chatelet stores, when I was buying some garden chairs for our house at Sully. They had five children, my half-sisters and half-brothers, whom I don't know and who must lead a hard-working, uneventful life.

Prosper died last year. My mother sent me an announcement. Even if I didn't go to the funeral, I did send flowers and since then I have paid two short visits to the little bungalow in Saint-Maur where my mother is living at present.

We have nothing to say to each other. There is no common ground between us. She looks at me like a stranger and just murmurs:

'You look successful. If you're happy, so much the better!'

My father was a member of the Bar and had his chambers in the flat in the Rue Visconti. Did he go on too long living the life of an ex-student? It is hard for me to judge. Physically, he didn't resemble me, for he was a handsome man, a thoroughbred, with an elegance I have admired in certain men of his generation. Cultured, he moved among poets, artists, dreamers and young women, and it was unusual to see him come home, unsteady on his feet, before two in the morning.

Sometimes he would bring a woman with him, who would stay with us for a night or a month, occasionally, like a certain Leontine, longer.

Leontine entrenched herself in the house for so long that I expected her to get him to marry her in the end.

This didn't worry me, not by any means. I was rather proud of living in an atmosphere different from that of my school friends, still prouder when my father would give me a conspiratorial wink, for example when Pauline discovered a new woman lodger in the house and looked like thunder.

I remember her putting one of them out of the door, bodily, with an astounding energy for such a little thing, while my father was absent of course (he must have been at the Palais), shouting at the girl that she was as dirty as a dish-rag and too foul-mouthed to stay another hour under a decent roof.

Was my father unhappy? I recall him nearly always smiling, although it was a smile devoid of gaiety. He was too reserved to complain and had the good taste to create around him a light-heartedness I have never known since.

When I was beginning to study law, he was, at fifty, still a handsome man, but he was growing less able to carry his liquor and he would sometimes spend whole days in bed.

He knew of my start with Maitre Andrieu. He was present, two years later, at my marriage to Viviane. Although we lived at the Rue Visconti with the same liberty, the same independence, as guest in a boarding-house, even to the point where we would sometimes go three days without seeing each other, I'm sure he was upset by the void created by my leaving.

Pauline, as she got older, was losing her good humour and her indulgence, and treated him, not as her master any more, but as someone in her charge, inflicting on him a diet he abhorred, ferreting out his bottles, which he was obliged to hide, even going to look for him, at night, in the taverns of the neighbourhood.

My father and I never asked each other questions. Nor did we ever make any allusion to our private lives, still less to our ideas and opinions.

Even today I still don't know whether Pauline was anything more to him, at a certain time, than a governess.

He died at seventy-one, only a few minutes after I had been to see him, as if he had purposely waited in order to spare me the sight of his passing.

I have had to talk about all that, not out of filial piety, but because the Rue Visconti flat may have had a certain influence on my fundamental tastes. For me, it's true, my father's study, with its books lining the walls

right up to the ceiling, its periodicals stacked on the floor, its small-paned windows looking out, beyond a medieval courtyard, on what was once Delacroix's studio, has remained the kind of place it's good to live in.

My ambition, when I entered law school, was not a rapid and brilliant career, but to live out my life in a lawyer's chambers, and I aspired to become an impecunious jurist far sooner than a barrister.

Is that still my dream today? I'd rather not ask the question. With my outsize head, I was the typical brilliant student, and when my father came home at night there was nearly always a light in my room, where I often studied until daybreak.

My idea of my future career was shared so fully by my tutors that, without telling me, they mentioned me to Maitre Andrieu, at that time President of the French Bar, whose name is still cited today as one of the outstanding lawyers of the last half-century.

I can see now the visiting-card which I found one morning in my post, bearing, beneath the engraved words, one sentence written in very fine handwriting, very 'artistic', as was still the expression.

M. Robert Andrieu would be obliged if you would call on him some morning between ten o'clock and noon in his chambers, 66, Boulevard Malesherbes.

I must have kept this card, which is probably in a cardboard box with some other souvenirs. I was twenty-five. Not only was Maitre Andrieu one of the glories of the Bar, but he was one of the most elegant men at the Palais and reputedly led a life of great luxury. His flat impressed me; still more the huge office, austere yet tasteful, whose windows opened on the Pare Monceau.

Later, I was to make the ridiculous gesture of ordering a black velvet waistcoat, edged with silk braid, like the one he was wearing that morning. I hasten to add that I never put it on and that I gave it away before Viviane could catch sight of it.

The offer Maitre Andrieu made me was to serve my apprenticeship with him, which was all the more unexpected since he had three assistants, lawyers already well-known on their own account.

I will not say that he resembled my father physically, and yet there were in the two men, who had experienced quite different fortunes, something like family traits, which were perhaps only traits of the period. The

meticulous courtesy, for instance, which they affected in their slightest dealings with others, and also a certain respect for mankind which made them speak to a servant in the same tone as to a society lady. It was above all the similarity in their smile that struck me, a sadness—or nostalgia—well enough hidden to be barely suspected.

Not only did Maitre Andrieu enjoy an exceptional reputation as a jurist, but he was a fashionable man and numbered artists, writers and Opera stars among his clients.

There were two of us working in the same office, a big, red-haired youth, who has since gone into politics, and myself, and all we knew about the society life of our head was from rumour. At the start, I went for a month without seeing him, receiving my briefs and instructions from a man named Mouchonnet, who was his right hand.

Often in the evening there was a big dinner or reception. Two or three times, in the lift, I saw Madame Andrieu, much younger than her husband, who was spoken of as one of the beauties of Paris and who was in my eyes an inaccessible being.

Shall I admit that my first recollection of Viviane is that of her scent, one afternoon when I took the lift which she had just left? Another time, I caught sight of her in person, dressed in black, a little veil over her eyes, as she stepped into the long limousine whose chauffeur was holding the door open.

Nothing indicated that she was to become my wife, and yet that's what happened.

She didn't come, like many pretty women, from the demi-monde or the stage, but from a good bourgeois provincial family. Her father, son of a doctor in Perpignan, was at that time a captain in the *gendarmerie*, and lived with his family in various places in France, moving with every promotion, finally retiring to his native Pyrenees, where today he keeps bees.

We went to see him last spring. He also spends a few days in Paris from time to time, less often now that he's a widower.

I didn't know in the beginning that every two months or so Maitre Andrieu gave a dinner for his staff, and it was at one of those dinners that I was introduced to Viviane for the first time. She was twenty-eight and she had been married for six years. As to the President of the Bar, he was over

fifty and had lived alone for a long time after a first marriage which had given him a son.

This son, aged twenty-five, lived in a Swiss sanatorium and I think he has since died.

I am ugly, as I have said, and I don't underestimate my ugliness, which gives me the right to add that it is compensated for by the impression of power, or rather of intense life, which emanates from me. This, by the way, is one of my trump cards in court, and the newspapers have spoken of my magnetism often enough to justify my alluding to it.

This concentrated vitality is the only explanation I can find for the interest Viviane showed in me from the first day, an interest which sometimes bordered on fascination.

During the meal, as I was the youngest of the guests, I found myself some distance away from her, but I felt her curious look resting on me and, when the time came for coffee, it was next to me that she sat down in the drawing-room.

Later, the two of us were to recall that evening, which we called 'the question evening', because, for almost an hour, she asked me questions, often indiscreet ones, which I, ill at ease, tried to answer.

The case of Corine and Jean Moriat might offer an explanation for what happened and it might not be entirely false, but I still think it wasn't considerations of that kind that came into play the first evening and that they wouldn't have come into play at all if there hadn't been a sort of involvement, right from the very first contact.

In keeping with his character, and on account of the difference in age, Andrieu had a tendency to treat his wife as a spoiled child rather than a partner or mistress. Later a few revealing words escaped Viviane, suggesting that with him she did not find the sexual satisfaction she urgently needed.

Did she seek it with other men? Did Andrieu suspect her of this?

I have heard a certain Philippe Savard smilingly mentioned, a young dilettante who was for a time a frequent visitor at the Boulevard Malesherbes and who suddenly stopped going there. During this period Viviane, who as a child, used to ride a great deal with her father, went riding every morning in the Bois with this Savard and, what's more, he used to accompany her to the theatre on the evenings when Maitre Andrieu couldn't go.

In any case, after that first dinner our contacts became more frequent, though harmless. With the consent of her husband, Viviane used me, the junior member of the firm, for personal errands, little social duties, which every once in a while gave me access to her flat.

The theatre brought us even closer, or, more precisely, a concert which took place one evening when my master had to go to an official banquet. At Viviane's instigation, I suppose, he asked me to serve as her escort.

Did she study me, take my measure, as Corine did with the deputy for Deux-Sevres? Was she really already feeling a need to play a more active role than she could with her husband?

The idea didn't occur to me at the time. I was dazzled, carried away, incapable of believing that my dreams might be realized. For a week I even thought very sincerely of leaving Maitre Andrieu's office to escape too cruel a disappointment.

A trip he made to Montreal, where he had just received an honorary degree from Laval University, was to precipitate events. His absence lasted two months, instead of the expected three weeks, because of an attack of bronchitis which he suffered over there. I didn't know that, as a young man, he had spent three years high in the mountains, as his son was doing now.

Viviane asked me several times to take her out in the evening. Not only did we go to the theatre, which she loved, but one night we had supper at a cabaret. She had sent the car home and it was on the way back in a taxi that, staking everything, I bent over her.

Two days later, on the maid's day off, I was admitted to her flat for an hour. Then, when Andrieu came home, we were forced to meet in a hotel, which, the first time, filled me with shame.

Did he find out the truth? Did he learn it only on the day when she decided to tell him what the situation was?

I, who so relentlessly demand precise facts from my clients, am having trouble establishing them in my own case. For years, I was convinced that Andrieu was unaware of anything. Later, I wasn't sure. For the last few months, I've been inclined to think the contrary.

I spoke about a sign just now. I suspected nothing at the time and I would no doubt have made fun of anyone who had spoken to me about one. Well, if anyone in the world ever bore that sign, it was certainly Maitre Andrieu.

The day Viviane had fixed to tell him, I had submitted my resignation, surprised at the way he had accepted it, sad and resigned at the same time.

'I wish you the success you deserve,' he said, giving me his long, well-cared-for hand.

This was only a few hours before the confession.

I waited for word from Viviane for two long weeks. She had promised to telephone me at the Rue Visconti immediately after their talk. Her bags were packed. Mine too. We were to move into a hotel on the Quai des Grands-Augustins until we could get a flat, and I had already found a position with a commercial lawyer who has since come to a bad end.

The next day I didn't dare telephone the Boulevard Malesherbes and, leaving Pauline instructions in case there was a call, I went and stood watch outside her house.

It was not until three days later that I learned from my father, who had heard it at the Palais, that Andrieu had had a relapse and was confined to bed. On that point, too, my opinion isn't the same as I held twenty years ago. Today I think that a man for whom a woman has become the main reason for living is capable of anything, of cowardice, baseness, cruelty, to keep her, cost what it may.

A scribbled note finally told me:

'I'll be at the Quai des Grands-Augustins Thursday morning about ten.'

She arrived there at half-past ten with her bags, in a cab, although Andrieu had insisted on her taking the car.

Our first days were joyless, and it was Viviane who recovered first, finding thousands of unexpected pleasures in her new life.

It was she, too, who found the flat in the Place Denfert-Rochereau and who dug up, among her former acquaintances, my first important client.

'You'll see, later, when you're the most prominent lawyer in Paris, how sentimental we'll get when we remember this flat!'

Andrieu had insisted on letting her divorce him as the guilty party. Weeks went by without our hearing anything about this when, one morning in March, the newspaper brought us the news:

'Andrieu, President of the Bar, victim of a climbing accident:

It was reported that he had gone to visit his son in a Davos sanatorium and, taking the opportunity of doing a mountain climb alone, he had slipped into a crevasse. His body was not found until two days later by a guide.

That ending, too, like his long silky moustache, his courtesy, his half-tone smile, has for me the aroma of the period.

It is clear now why, when people call us a couple of wild creatures, they are unwittingly touching on a hypersensitive point?

We had to cling to each other with all our strength so as not to be overwhelmed with remorse and disgust. Only a consuming passion could serve as our excuse, and we made love like two maniacs, we held one another tight as we looked stonily at a future which was going to be a revenge.

For a year I hardly saw my father, except from a distance, at the Palais, because I was working fourteen and fifteen hours a day, taking on any kind of case, soliciting them, while I waited for the one that would establish my reputation. It wasn't until the evening before our wedding that I went to the Rue Visconti.

'I'd like you to meet my future wife,' I said to my father.

He had certainly heard about our affair, which caused quite a lot of talk at the Palais, but he said nothing to me about it, just looked at me and asked:

'Are you happy?'

I said yes, and I thought I was. Perhaps I actually was. We got married without any fuss at the town hall of the Fourteenth Arrondissement and we went for a few days' rest to an inn in the forest of Orléans, at Sully, where six years later we were to buy a country house.

It was there that a man came to see me who had obtained our address from our concierge and who, looking around the inn where a few customers were arguing at the bar, muttered as he motioned me to follow him:

'Let's go and talk by the canal.'

I couldn't place him socially. He didn't seem like what we then called a social outcast, nor what we today call a gangster. Rather shabbily dressed in dark clothes, untidy, his eyes defiant, his mouth bitter, he suggested one of those weary characters who go from door to door collecting payments on bills.

'My name won't mean anything to you,' he began, as soon as we had passed the few barges moored at the quay. 'As for me, I know all I need know about you and I think you're my man.'

He interrupted himself to ask:

'Is that your legal wife staying with you at the inn?'

And, when I said yes:

'I don't trust people in irregular situations. I go straight to the point. I'm not in any trouble with the law and I don't want to be. All the same, I still

need the best lawyer I can afford and you may be the man. I don't own any shops or offices, I haven't got any factories or patents, but I deal in very big business, much bigger than most men who think they're somebody.'

He put a certain aggressiveness into it, as if in protest against the modesty of his appearance and dress.

'As a lawyer, you have no right to repeat what I'm going to tell you in confidence and I can show my own hand. You've heard of the gold traffic. Since rates of exchange vary almost every day and currencies, in most countries, are pegged at an official rate, there's a big profit in moving gold from one place to another, and the frontiers to be crossed change with the market. From time to time the papers report that an agent has been caught at Modane, at Aulnoye, getting off the Dover boat, or somewhere else. They hardly ever follow the chain much further back, but it might happen. Well, the end of the chain is me.'

He lit a cigarette and stopped to look at the circles made by insects on the surface of the canal.

'I've studied the question, not as a smart lawyer might, but enough to realize that there are legal ways to keep out of trouble. I have at my disposal two export-import companies and as many agencies abroad as I need. I'll buy your services by the year. I'll only take up a small part of your time and you're free to defend anyone you like in court. Before every deal I'll consult you and it's up to you to make it safe.'

He turned towards me for the first time since we had left the inn and, looking me in the face, he said casually:

'That's all.'

I had grown red and my fists were clenched in anger. I was going to open my mouth—and without doubt my protest would have been violent—when, seeing my reaction, he murmured:

'I'll see you tonight after dinner. Talk to your wife.'

I didn't go back immediately, because I wanted some exercise to calm my nerves. At the hotel it was aperitif time and there were too many people at the bar for us to be able to talk.

'All alone?' Viviane asked, surprised.

It was beginning to get cool outside, a damp coolness. I took her up to our bedroom, with its flowered wallpaper, smelling of the countryside. I spoke quietly, because we heard the voices of the people in the bar and they could have heard us.

'He left me on the tow-path and told me he'd come for my reply this evening after I'd talked it over with you.'

'What reply?'

I repeated what he had said to me and I saw her listen without reacting.

'It's unhopd for, isn't it?'

'Don't you understand what he wants of me?'

'Advice. Isn't it your job as a lawyer to give it?'

'Advice in getting round the law.'

'That's true of most of the advice people want from a lawyer, if I'm not entirely mistaken.'

I thought she didn't comprehend. I made an effort to dot all the i's, but she remained calm.

'How much did he offer you?'

'He didn't mention any figure.'

'And yet it all depends on the figure. Do you realize, Lucien, that this means the end of our difficulties and that a lawyer for a big company does exactly the same work?'

She was forgetting to speak quietly. 'Ssh!'

'You didn't say anything that might prevent him coming back?'

'I didn't open my mouth.'

'What's his name?'

'I don't know.'

I know it well enough today. He's called Joseph Bocca, although even after so many years I'm not sure that that's his real name, any more than I would swear to his nationality. Besides his town house in Paris and farms all over France, he has bought a magnificent estate on the Riviera, at Mentone, where he lives for part of the year and where he has invited us, my wife and me, to spend as much time as we like.

He is a well-known man now, because, with the fortune he made in the gold traffic, he set up a textile business which has branches in Italy and Greece and he has interests in various companies. I wouldn't be surprised, on Monday, when the South American ambassador comes to see me, to discover that Bocca is mixed up in this arms business.

I was still dreaming of becoming a distinguished jurist.

'All I ask of you tonight, is not to put him off with a ruthless no.'

When he returned, about half-past eight, just as we were finishing dinner, we went for a walk in the dark and I said yes, straight away, to get it over

with, and also because he left me no choice.

'It's all or nothing.'

He named his figure.

'Next week I'll send one of my men to you; he's called Coutelle and he'll explain the actual set-up of the operations. You are to study the question at your leisure and, when you've found a solution, you're to telephone me.'

He handed me not a visiting-card but a scrap of paper on which was written the name Joseph Bocca, a telephone number somewhere near the Louvre and an address in the Rue Coquilière.

Out of curiosity, I went and took a look at the building with its dingy staircase and corridors, where I found, as enamel plates on the street door indicated, a queer sampling of the most unexpected professions, a masseuse, a typing school, a firm dealing in artificial flowers, a private detective, an employment agency and a butcher's trade paper.

And, in addition, the 'I.P.F.' export company.

I preferred not to show my face and to wait for this man Coutelle's call at my office. He came back often over the years and, last time, it was to tell me that he was retiring to a house he had just built on the cliffs at Fécamp.

Viviane did not force my hand. I acted of my own free will. What I regret now is having gone so far back in my life, for it is not the past but the present that I had promised myself to deal with in this dossier.

They say that one explains the other and I'm reluctant to believe it.

It is two o'clock in the morning. In spite of the weather forecast, the wind has begun to blow at gale force once more and I can hear the shutter on the floor below beginning to bang again. In the Rue Jacob the heat must be stifling, and half the people crowding in there already meet ten times a week at dress rehearsals, cocktail parties, charity bazaars or more or less official ceremonies.

It is possible that Marie-Lou has talent, although I don't believe in belated vocations. She told me yesterday at dinner that she would like to do a portrait of me because I have a 'powerful mask', and Lannier who heard it, smiled and slowly exhaled the smoke of his cigarette.

He's an important man, and every time his newspapers are sued for libel, he appeals to me. On the other hand, he's never asked me to represent him in a civil suit, of which he always has one or two on hand. No doubt he, and he's not the only one, considers me a show-off, capable of getting a verdict by the brilliance and fire of a speech to the court, by the violence and

astuteness of attacks and counter-attacks, but he wouldn't let me appear before the cold judges of the civil courts.

Does he too have dealings with Bocca? Probably. You don't stay long in my business without realizing that at a certain level in the pyramid there are just a few men left who share the power, the money, and the women.

I'm trying not to think of Yvette and every five minutes I'm wondering what 'they' are doing. Have they gone to one of those cheap nightclubs she likes where, in spite of everything, I would be out of place? Or did they choose one of those popular dance-halls in Montmartre full of typists and sales-girls from the big shops ?

She'll tell me tomorrow if I ask her. Are they eating *choucroute* in a bar?

Perhaps they've gone home already?

I'm getting impatient, wishing my wife would come in, so I can go to bed. I think of Maitre Andrieu; perhaps he, too, used to wait in his office, where, as soon as it was autumn, he loved to plant himself with his back to the log fire.

I have no intention of going to Switzerland or doing any mountain climbing. The case is different. Everything is different. Two lives, two situations, are never alike and I'm wrong to pay any attention to this business of signs, which is beginning to haunt me.

It's a long time since I had a holiday. I'm tired. Older than I thought she is, Viviane sets a pace I can't keep up without getting out of breath.

I'll ask Pémal to come to see me. He'll prescribe new medicine, advise me again not to drive the engine too hard and he'll repeat that men, like women, have their change of life.

According to him, I'm in the middle of the change of life!

'Wait till you're fifty and you'll be surprised how much younger and more vigorous you feel than today.'

He, at sixty, begins his calls at eight in the morning, if not earlier, and finishes them at ten at night and he doesn't hesitate to answer night calls.

I've always known him even-tempered, a mischievous smile on his lips, as if he found it amusing to watch people worry about their health.

The lift is coming up, stops at the floor below.

It's my wife coming home.

IV

Sunday, November 11, 10 a.m.

When I got home this morning about half-past eight, I took two phenobarbitones and lay down, but the drug had no effect and in the end I thought I might as well get up. After a cold shower, I went down to my office and, before sitting down, I made sure that 'he' isn't keeping watch on the sidewalk.

The weather forecast was right, after all. The wind has dropped, the sky is like new and there's a nip in the air; the people you see going to Mass have their hands stuck in their pockets and their heels ring out on the pavement. My tramps aren't under the Pont-Marie; I wonder if they've moved on or if it's their turn to sleep aboard the Salvation Army barge.

Last night, when I heard Viviane come home, I closed my dossier and, when I was almost at the top of the stairs, the telephone bell startled me, because I immediately thought of bad news.

'Is that you?' said Yvette's voice at the other end.

It wasn't her normal voice, but her voice when she's been drinking or is over-excited.

'You weren't in bed?'

'I was just going up.'

'You told me you hardly ever go to bed before two, especially on Sa . . .'

She bit her tongue without finishing the word Saturday. It was I who asked:

'Where are you?'

'Rue Caulaincourt, at Manière's.'

There was a silence. For her to call me on a Saturday night meant there had been trouble.

'Alone?'

'Yes.'

'For long?'

'Half an hour. Look, Lucien, would you mind coming for me?'

'You're worried? What's going on?'

'Nothing. I'll tell you. Are you coming straight away?'

I found my wife undressing.

'Aren't you in bed?' she said.

'I was going upstairs when I got a phone call. I've got to go out.'

She threw me an inquisitive glance.

'Something wrong?'

'I don't know. She wouldn't tell me.'

'You'd better wake Albert to drive you. He'll be ready in a few minutes.'

'I'd rather take a taxi. Was it a good party at the Rue Jacob?'

'We were twice as many as expected and some friends had to volunteer to go and get some extra cases of champagne in their car. You look annoyed.'

I was. Outside, surprised by the cold, I had to walk all the way to the Châtelet to find a taxi. I know Manière's restaurant, in Montmartre, but I didn't know that Yvette was going there nowadays, too. For my wife and myself, it represents a period, a phase. The second year of our marriage, we were crazy about canoeing for a time, and we used to go out on Sundays on the Marne, between Chelles and Lagny. The same group used to get together there, mostly young couples, especially doctors and lawyers, and we got into the habit of meeting during the week at Maniere's.

From one day to the next, for no reason that I can remember, that period came to an end and another began; we belonged to several groups, one after another, before ending up in our present circle. I have sometimes envied people who stay in the same milieu all their lives. Not long ago we went through Chelles, one Sunday morning, on our way to friends who have a place near there, and I was surprised to recognize on the water, in the same canoes, a certain number of the couples of those days, old now, with grown-up children.

I don't know how many years it is since I set foot in Manière's, but as I pushed open the door, I got a whiff of a familiar smell and I don't think the atmosphere has changed much. I caught sight of Yvette with a glass of whiskey and her selection of that drink told me what I needed to know about her state of mind.

'Take off your coat and sit down,' she said, with the important air of someone who has serious news to announce.

The waiter came forward and I ordered whiskey too, I drank several more later and that is what prevented me from sleeping this morning, for a certain amount of alcohol makes me restless rather than drowsy.

'You didn't notice anyone on the pavement?'

'No. Why?'

'I was wondering if he hadn't come back to spy on me. He's that type of man. In the state he's in, he's capable of anything.'

'You've had a row?'

When she has had two or three drinks, things are never that simple. She looked me in the eyes, tragically, to declare:

'Forgive me, Lucien. I ought to make you happy. I try with all my might and I only manage to make trouble for you and hurt you. You should have thrown me out the first day I came to see you, and at this moment I'd be in my right place, in prison.'

'Don't speak so loud.'

'Excuse me. It's true that I've been drinking, but I'm not drunk. I swear to you I'm not drunk. It's important that you believe me. If you see me in this state, it's because I'm afraid, especially for you.'

'Tell me what's happened.'

'We went to a cinema where they were showing a picture he'd been wanting to see for ages, and when we came out, I wanted to have a snack in the Place du Tertre.'

Her taste runs to noisy, brightly coloured places, vulgar, strident settings.

'He didn't speak to me immediately. I could tell he wasn't his usual self, but I didn't think it was that serious. All of a sudden, when we'd been dancing and were going back to our seats, he stopped me just as I was sitting down and said, knitting his brows:

' "Do you know what we're going to do?"

'And I—forgive me—said:

' "For heaven's sake!"

' "That's not what I'm talking about. We are going to the Rue de Ponthieu, but it's to get your things and you're coming to my place. I've finally got the room they've been promising me for so long. It's big enough for two and it overlooks the street." "Thinking he was just talking, I answered:

' "You know that's quite impossible, Leonard."

' "No. I've thought about it. It's too stupid to live the way we do. You've often told me you don't care about a big flat or a luxurious life. You've known worse than the Quai de Javel, haven't you?" '

While she was talking with animation, I sat quite still on the bench, my eyes fixed on a couple drinking champagne and kissing between swallows. At one point, they were diverting themselves by transferring the champagne from mouth to mouth, by kissing.

'I'm listening,' I sighed, after Yvette had been silent for a few moments.

'I can't tell you everything. It would take too long. He's never said as much as he said today. He maintains that he's finally sure he loves me and that nothing will make him give me up.'

'Did he talk about me?'

She didn't answer.

'What did he say?'

'That I don't owe you any gratitude, that you are nothing but an egoist, a . . .'

'A what?'

'Well then, since you insist, a pervert. He hasn't understood anything, says you're acting just like a man of your class, and so on ... I told him that was untrue, that he didn't know you and that I refused to leave you. There were a lot of people around us. A singer made us be quiet for a time and that gave me a chance to observe him and to realize that he's acquired an evil look. When the singer shut up, he said:

' "If you want to do it, call him right now on the phone and tell him our decision."

'I refused, repeating that I wouldn't go with him.

' "In that case, I do the telephoning and speak to him myself. I bet you he'll understand."

'I clung to him and to gain time I suggested:

' "Let's go somewhere else. Everyone's looking at us and thinking we're having a row."

'We walked in the darkness of the little street up there, with long silences. You've asked me to tell you everything. Lucien. I swear to you that I didn't hesitate in making my decision, that I was only looking for a way to get rid of him. When I saw the lights in Manière's, I pretended I was thirsty, we came in and I ordered a whiskey, which I badly needed, because the scene was beginning over again.

' "What would you have that you haven't got now," I asked him, "if I came to live with you at Javel?"

' "You'd be my wife."

' "What do you mean?"

' "What I say. I'd marry you." '

She emptied her glass, laughed scornfully:

'Do you realize? I burst out laughing, but it was a queer feeling all the same, because that's the first time a man has made me that proposal.

' "Within a month," I replied, "you'd regret it, or else I'd have had enough of you."

' "No."

' "I'm not made to live with a man."

' "All women are made for that."

' "Not me."

' "That's my business."

' "That's my business too."

' "Admit that it's because of him that you're refusing."

I admitted nothing, I kept silent and he went on:

' "You're afraid of him?"

' "No."

' "Then you love him?" '

She fell silent again, signalled to the waiter.

'Same again.'

'For both?'

I said yes without thinking.

'He repeated:

' "You love him? Admit it. Tell me the truth."

'I don't know any more what I finally replied, and, in great anger, he got up, snapping at me:

' "I'll settle the matter with him and no one else."

'He left furious and pale, after throwing some money on the table for our drinks.'

'Had he been drinking?'

'A few. Not enough to have that much effect. I expected him to calm down when he got outside and come back and apologize. Before I rang you, I sat here all alone in my corner for half an hour, cooling my heels and jumping every time the door opened. Suddenly it dawned on me that he might have gone to find you at home.'

'I didn't see anyone.'

'He'll do it, I'm sure, because he wasn't just talking. He's not the type of boy to reach a decision lightly, and when he has an idea in his head, he carries it out at any price. Like in his studies! I'm frightened, Lucien. I'm so afraid something may happen to you.'

'Let's go.'

'Let me have another drink.'

It was the one too many; I knew it when her speech got thick and her eyes glassy, and also from the tone of what she said:

'You are sure I wouldn't leave you for anything in the world, aren't you? You must know it, you must know that you mean everything to me, that before you I didn't exist and that, if you weren't there any more . . .'

I called the waiter to pay and she succeeded in finishing my drink as well. When we left, she begged me to make sure no one was watching for us outside. We were lucky enough to find a taxi without waiting and told him to take us to the Rue de Ponthieu. In the car she huddled against me, sniffing, shaken from time to time by a sob.

Her story isn't necessarily accurate and I shall never know what she said to Mazetti. Even without any reason to lie, she feels a need to tell stories and ends by believing them.

When it started, didn't she swear to Mazetti that I was no more than her lawyer, that she was innocent in the Rue de l'Abbe-Gregoire affair and that she owed me eternal gratitude for having saved her from an unjust conviction?

This leads me back to July, one weekday, I don't remember which, when I had taken her to Saint-Cloud for lunch in an outdoor restaurant of the kind she likes. The terrace where we were eating was crowded and I paid only slight attention to two young men in shirt sleeves, one with very dark curly hair, who were sitting at the next table and never stopped looking in our direction. I had an important appointment at half-past two and at a quarter past we hadn't even reached the dessert. I told Yvette I would have to go.

'May I stay?' she asked.

She didn't tell me anything the next day, nor the day after, not until three days later, when the lights were out and we were going to sleep.

'Are you asleep, Lucien?'

'No.'

'Can I talk to you?'

'Of course you can talk to me. Do you want me to put the light on?'

'No. I think I've done something bad again.'

I've often wondered if her honesty and her mania for confession come from her conscience or from a natural cruelty, perhaps from a need to give her life interest by colouring it with drama.

'Didn't you notice the two young men, the other day, at Saint-Cloud?'

'Which ones?'

'They were at the next table. One of them was dark and very muscular.'

'Yes.'

'When you left, I realized he was going to speak to me when I saw him getting rid of his friend, and, as a matter of fact, a little later he asked me if he might have his coffee at my table.'

She's had other affairs since we've known each other and I think she is honest when she claims that I know about all of them. The first, a fortnight after her acquittal, while she was still living on the Boulevard Saint-Michel, was with a jazz-player in a night-club near Saint-Germain-des-Pres. She confessed to me that she used to sit the whole evening near the band and that the second night he took her home with him.

'Are you jealous, Lucien?'

'Yes.'

'Does this hurt you very much?'

'Yes. Never mind.'

'Do you think I'm capable of controlling myself?'

'No.'

It's true. It's not only the senses that are responsible. It's deeper, a need to live a different life, to be the centre of something, to feel attention on herself. I had been convinced of it at the assizes, when she probably spent the most intoxicating hours of her life in that court.

'You still want me to tell you everything?'

'Yes.'

'Even if it hurts you?'

'That's my problem.'

'Are you angry with me?'

'It's not your fault.'

'Do you think I'm made differently from other women?'

'No.'

'Well then, how do the others manage?'

At these moments, when we reach a certain point of absurdity, I turn my back on her, because I know what she wants: for us to discuss her case endlessly, analyse her personality, her instincts, her behaviour.

She realizes it too.

'I don't interest you any more?'

Whereupon she sulks, or cries, then she watches me for a moment like a little girl who's been disobedient and decides to come and apologize.

'I don't understand how you put up with me. But have you ever thought, Lucien, how exasperating it can be for a woman to find herself confronted by a man who knows everything, who guesses everything?'

With the jazz-musician, it only lasted five days. One evening I found her strange, feverish, her eyes dilated and, by asking her the necessary questions, I obtained the admission that he had persuaded her to take heroin. I got angry and when, next day, I realized that she had seen him again although I had forbidden it, I slapped her in the face for the first time, so hard that she bore a mark under her left eye for several days.

I can't watch her day and night, or demand that she spend all her time waiting for me. I know I don't satisfy her and I'm obliged to let her seek the rest elsewhere. If I suffer for it, that's too bad.

During the early months, anxiety predominated, for I wondered if she would come back to me or if she would charge headlong into some sordid affair.

Since Saint-Cloud my worries have taken on a different form.

'He's a boy of Italian origin, but he was born in France and he's a French citizen. Do you know what he does? He's both a medical student and a worker on the night-shift at Citroën's. Don't you think that shows guts?'

'Where did he take you?'

'Nowhere. That's not his line. We walked back through the Bois de Boulogne and I don't think I ever walked as far in my life. Are you angry?'

'Why should I be angry?'

'Because I didn't tell you before.'

'Have you seen him again?'

'Yes.'

'When?'

'Yesterday.'

'Where?'

'On the terrace of the Normandie, on the Champs-Élysées, where he'd made a date with me.'

'By telephone?'

So he already knew her number.

'You're always afraid I'll get mixed up with some hoodlum, so I thought you'd be glad. His father's a bricklayer at Villefranche-sur-Saône, not far

from Lyons where I was born, and his mother washes dishes in a restaurant. He has seven brothers and sisters. Since he was fifteen he's been working to pay for his studies. At present he lives in a little room, at Javel, near the factory, and doesn't sleep more than five hours a day.'

'When are you seeing him again?'

I knew she had an idea in the back of her mind.

'That depends on you.'

'What do you mean?'

'If you don't want me to, I won't see him again at all.'

'When did he ask you to see him again?'

'On Saturday evenings he doesn't work at the factory.'

'Do you want to meet him next Saturday?'

She didn't answer. On Sunday morning, telephoning the Rue de Ponthieu, I realized from her embarrassment that she wasn't alone. That was the first time, to my knowledge, that she had taken someone else to a flat which is, after all, ours.

'Is he there?'

'Yes.'

'Shall I meet you at Louis?'

'If you like.'

The night of Saturday to Sunday has become 'their' night, and, for some time, Mazetti believed the story of the big-hearted lawyer. Yvette confessed to me that, occasionally, during the day, she would go over to the Quai de Javel to give him a kiss while he was studying.

'Just to cheer him up. The room is tiny and there's nothing but factory hands in the hotel, mostly Arabs and Poles. On the stairs, I'm scared of those men who don't stand aside to let me pass and look at me with shining eyes.'

He has been to the Rue de Ponthieu on other days besides Saturday, because one afternoon I passed him in the entrance. We recognized each other. He hesitated, nodded to me with some embarrassment, and I returned his courtesy.

Possibly just to add piquancy to the affair, Yvette, as I was expecting, finally admitted to him that I am not only her benefactor, but her lover.

She also told him about the hold-up in the Rue de l'Abbe-Gregoire, the true version this time, adding that, for her sake, I had risked my honour and my position.

'That man—he's scared. Understand?'

What does it matter whether she said it or not? The fact remains that he didn't protest and that another time we met in the street he nodded to me again, looking at me curiously.

I wonder if she hasn't made out that I'm impotent, that I confine myself to intimacies which he has no need to resent? It's not true, but she's told me less plausible fairy tales.

Neither of them understands a thing, of course. And now what was bound to happen is happening.

'What else did he say?' I asked, once we were inside the flat.

'I forget. I'd rather not repeat it. All those things that young men say about men of your age who act as if they were in love.'

She had opened a cupboard and I saw her drinking out of a bottle.

'Stop that!'

Looking at me, she took the time to swallow one last gulp.

Then, her speech thick, she asks:

'Can't you have him arrested, with your connections?'

'On what pretext?'

'He has threatened you.'

'What threats?'

'Maybe it wasn't very definite, but he hinted that he'd find a way to get rid of you.'

'In what terms?'

Here I know she is lying, or at least embroidering.

'Even if that were true, it wouldn't be sufficient reason to arrest him. Would you like to see him in prison?'

'I don't want anything awful to happen to you. You're all I have, you know it.'

She thinks so and it's more serious than she believes. She would be totally lost, and unhappy, if she found herself on her own again; it wouldn't take her long to come to a bad end.

'I'm sick, Lucien.'

I can see it. She's drunk too much and it won't be long before she vomits.

'I hadn't the vaguest idea that it would turn out like this! I thought it was convenient. I knew you were pleased. . . .'

She realizes that the word is a bit strong.

'Forgive me. You see! It's always the same with me. I make every effort to do what's right and everything I try turns out wrong. What I do swear to you, on your life, is that I won't see him again. Take a look in the street, will you?'

I opened the curtains a crack and saw no one in the lamplight.

'What I'm afraid of is that he may be getting drunk, because he doesn't carry his liquor very well. It makes him mean; and he's usually so calm and so easy to get along with. Once, when he'd had one glass too many . . .'

She doesn't finish her sentence and rushes into the bathroom where I can hear her retching.

'I'm ashamed of myself, Lucien . . .' she mumbles, between two bouts of sickness. 'If you knew how I hate myself! ... I wonder how you can . . .'

I undressed her and put her to bed. I got undressed myself and lay down beside her. Two or three times, in her restless sleep, she uttered words I couldn't distinguish.

It's possible that Mazetti is getting drunk in an all-night bar of which there are a few in Paris, or perhaps he is walking about the deserted avenues with long strides, exuding his grievances. It is also possible that he may come hanging around the Rue de Ponthieu, just as I myself, one day, hung around under the windows of the Boulevard Malesherbes.

If the account Yvette has given me of their evening and his attitude is not too romanticized, he will not let her go easily and it won't be long before he goes to work on her again.

Has she really told him all about her past and has she been as honest with him as with me? It didn't stop him from offering to marry her.

I must have dozed for a time, because the telephone bell made me jump out of bed and I hurried into the sitting-room to take off the receiver, hurting my foot badly when I bumped into a piece of furniture on the way. My first thought was that my wife was telephoning me, as has happened before, about something urgent. I didn't know what time it was. The bedroom was dark, but in the sitting-room I saw the whiteness of daylight through the crack in the curtains.

'Hello.'

Not hearing anything, I repeated:

'Hello.'

I understand. It is he who has rung up, not expecting me to be here. Now that he has recognized my voice, he hasn't hung up and I can hear him

breathing at the other end. It is rather impressive, especially as Yvette, who has woken up, has just appeared, naked and deathly pale in the half-light, and is staring at me with her wide-open eyes.

'Who is it?' she asks in a low voice.

I hang up and say:

'Wrong number.'

'Was it him?'

'I have no idea.'

'I'm certain it was. Now that he knows you're here, he'll come over. Put the light on, Lucien.'

That ray of daylight between the curtains gives her the shivers.

'I wonder where he's telephoning from. Maybe he's in the neighbourhood.'

I admit that I was uneasy myself. I have no desire to hear him knocking at the door of the flat, because, if he has gone on drinking, he is capable of making a scene.

I'm not answerable to him for anything, owe him no explanation. A three-way discussion would be ridiculous, odious.

'You'd better go.'

I don't want to seem to be running away, either.

'Would you rather be alone?'

'Yes. I can always find some way out.'

'Do you intend to let him in?'

'I don't know. I'll see. Get dressed.'

And another idea passes through her mind.

'Why not telephone the police?'

I dressed, humiliated, furious with myself. All this time, still naked, she was looking out of the window, her face pressed against the glass.

'You're sure you'd rather be alone?'

'Yes. Be quick!'

'I'll ring you when I get to the Quai d'Anjou.'

'All right. I'll be here all day.'

'I'll drop in and see you later.'

'Yes. Go along!'

She accompanied me on to the landing and kissed, still with nothing on, leaning over the banisters to remind me:

'Be careful!'

I wasn't afraid, although I don't pride myself on physical courage and I hate violence. All the same I was anxious to avoid an encounter, which could have been unpleasant, with an infuriated young man. All the more since I have nothing against him, nothing to reproach him with, and since I understand his state of mind.

The Rue de Ponthieu was deserted and only my footsteps were to be heard as I walked as far as the Rue de Berry to get a taxi. On the Champs-Élysées a couple in evening dress, foreigners, were going into Claridge's arm in arm, and the woman still had scraps of paper streamers in her hair.

'Quai d'Anjou. I'll tell you where.'

I was still worried for Yvette. If I know her, she hasn't gone back to bed and she's on watch at the window without thinking of getting dressed. Sometimes she spends most of the day with nothing on, even in summer, when all the windows are open.

'You do it on purpose,' I once declared.

'What?'

'Show yourself naked to the people across the street.'

She looked at me the way she looks at me when I've guessed right, with a smile which she tries to hide.

'It's fun, isn't it?'

Perhaps it would be fun for her, too, if Mazetti comes hounding her again? I'm not sure that if she knew where to get hold of him she wouldn't ring him up. This perpetual need of hers to get out of her own life, to create a character for herself.

I'm afraid that if she sees him in the street she may telephone the police, just for the excitement.

I'm the one who rings her up, the moment I'm in my office.

'This is Lucien.'

'Did you get home all right?'

'He hasn't come?'

'No.'

'Were you still at the window?'

'Yes.'

'Go back to bed.'

'You don't think he'll come?'

'I'm sure he won't. I'll ring you again soon.'

'I hope you're going to sleep too?'

'Yes.'

'I'm sorry for the bad night I've given you. I'm ashamed of getting tight, but I didn't realize I was drinking.'

'Go to bed.'

'Are you going to tell your wife?'

'I don't know.'

'Don't tell her I was sick.'

She knows that Viviane is fully informed and this bothers her, because, where Viviane is concerned, she would like to play a role that is not too humiliating. Suddenly she asks me about her.

'What exactly do you tell her? Everything we do?'

Occasionally, when she asks that question, she has added with an excited laugh:

'Even what I'm doing to you now?'

I looked out of my office window, as I've already written, and didn't see anyone on the quay. Probably Mazetti has gone home and is fast asleep.

I went up without a sound. All the same my wife half opened her eyelids just as I was swallowing my two tablets.

'Nothing serious?'

'No. Go to sleep.'

She couldn't have been quite awake, because she drifted back into sleep immediately. I tried to sleep too. I couldn't. My nerves were on edge, still are; I only need to see my writing to be convinced of it. Perhaps a graphologist would conclude that it is the writing of a madman or a drunk.

For some time I've been expecting something disagreeable, but I never imagined anything more disagreeable or more humiliating than the night I have just been through.

My eyes closed; in the warmth of my bed, I asked myself if Mazetti were not capable of doing violence to me. In the course of my career I've known more senseless gestures. I've never spoken to him. I've done no more than catch sight of him and he gave me the impression of a serious, reserved boy, who follows fanatically the line of conduct he has laid down for himself.

Does he realize that his affair with Yvette threatens the whole future he has prepared with such difficulty? If she has told him everything, if he knows her as I know her, is he naive enough to hope that he will suddenly change her by making her the wife of an ambitious young doctor?

He is in the middle of a crisis, incapable of reasoning. Tomorrow, or in a few days, he will see reality clear and will be happy that I exist.

The trouble is that I'm not so sure of it. Why should he react differently from me? Because he's too young to understand, to feel what I have felt?

I would like to believe that. I have looked for so many explanations of my attachment to Yvette! I have rejected them, one after another, taken them up again, combined them, mixed them up together without getting any satisfactory result and this morning I feel old and stupid. When I came down to my office just now, my head empty, my eyes stinging for lack of sleep, I looked at the books covering the walls and I shrugged my shoulders.

Did Andrieu in those days ever look at himself with contemptuous pity?

Today I envy those people who still go canoeing between Chelles and Lagny and all the others I dropped on the way because they couldn't keep up with me.

I'm busy watching through the window for a young lunatic who, it appears, has threatened to demand an explanation from me! I say it appears, because I'm not even sure that all this is true, that tonight or tomorrow Yvette won't confess to me that she exaggerated, if she didn't invent, a large part of what she told me.

I can't hold it against her, because that's her nature and because in the long run we all do it to some extent. The difference is that she has all the faults, all the vices, all the weaknesses. Not even that! She'd like to have them. It's a game she plays, her way of filling the void.

I'm not in a fit state, this morning, to analyse myself. What's the use, anyhow, and what's the use of knowing why, on account of her, I've reached the point I'm at?

It's not even certain that it's on account of her. The authors of musical comedies, the amusing authors who succeed in making life funny, call it the Indian summer and it becomes a subject for jokes.

I've never taken life tragically, I still try not to. I try to remain objective, to judge myself and to judge other people coldly. Above all I try to understand. When I began this dossier, I kind of winked at myself once, as if I were going in for some solitary game.

Well, I haven't laughed yet. This morning, I feel less like laughing than ever and I wonder if I wouldn't rather be inside the skin of one of those little bourgeois dressed up in their Sunday best hurrying to High Mass.

* * *

I've just rung Yvette for the second time, and she took a little while to come to the phone. From the way she says 'Hello' I sense something new.

'Are you alone?'

'No.'

'Is he there?'

'Yes.'

So that she won't have to talk in front of him, I ask precise questions.

'Furious?'

'No.'

'Has he apologized?'

'Yes.'

'Are his intentions still the same?'

'Well . . .'

Mazetti must have snatched the receiver from her hands, because it was abruptly hung up.

Old fool!

V

Saturday, November 24

FOR two weeks now I haven't had a minute to open this dossier and I've been living on my own momentum, convinced that the time will come when I shall collapse of exhaustion, incapable of one further step or word. Never before have I foreseen the possibility that talking may be beyond my strength, and it is a fact that I'm already beginning to talk less, from tiredness.

I'm not the only one to think of this eventual breakdown of my nerves. I read the same uneasiness in the expressions of the people around me and they are beginning to watch me surreptitiously like someone who's seriously ill. What do they know at the Palais about my intimate life? I have no idea, but there's a certain firmness in some handshakes, and there's the way they say, without insisting:

'Don't overdo it!'

Pémal, usually optimistic, raised his eyebrows as he took my blood-pressure the other day, in the den where I had to receive him hurriedly because I had a client in my office and two more in the waiting-room.

'I suppose it's useless to ask you to rest?'

'Impossible for the moment. It's up to you to see to it that I keep going.'

He gave me some vitamins or other, by injection, and since then a nurse comes every morning to give me another, between one door and the other, in the time it takes me to go into my den and let down my trousers. Pémal doesn't really have much faith in them.

'A time comes when you can't stretch the spring any tighter.'

That's the impression I have—of a spring which is beginning to quiver and which is about to snap. I feel all over my body something like a tremor which I'm powerless to stop and which is sometimes agonizing. I hardly

sleep. I haven't got time. I don't even dare to sit down in an easy-chair after meals, because I'm like those ailing horses which avoid lying down for fear of not being able to get up again.

I am making an effort to meet my obligations on all fronts and it's a matter of vanity to me to accompany Viviane to fashionable occasions, to cocktail parties, to dress rehearsals, to dinner at Corine's and anywhere else where I know it would be embarrassing for her to be seen alone.

She's grateful for it, although she doesn't mention it to me, but she is worried. As if it had been deliberately arranged, I've never had so many cases, at the Palais, nor such important ones, which I can't delegate to anyone else.

The South American ambassador, for instance, came to see me on Monday as arranged and, even though I hadn't been altogether wrong about the nature of his problems, I hadn't guessed the truth. They've got the arms. It's his father who intends to seize power by means of a *coup d'état* which is supposed to be brief and not too bloody. According to my informant, whose voice had become passionate, his father is staking his life and his fortune, which is immense, for the sole good of his country, now in the hands of a gang of politicians who are ruining it for their own gain.

So the arms, including three four-engined aircraft on which the conspirator's plan rests, are aboard a ship flying the Panamanian flag, which, having sustained some damage, has had the bad luck to have to seek temporary shelter at Martinique.

The damage wasn't serious. It was a question of two or three days. As luck would have it, a customs official, an eager beaver, inspects the cargo and finds that it doesn't correspond to the bill of lading. The captain, for his part, was tactless enough to offer him money, and the customs man has set the clumsy administrative machinery going, immobilizing the ship in port.

Without him, everything would have been easy, because the French government asks only to keep its eyes shut. But now, with official reports on the way, it becomes an extremely touchy affair and I've had an interview with the premier himself, who is full of goodwill but almost defenceless against the customs official. Cases do exist, as I know from experience, in which the most insignificant civil servant can hold cabinet ministers in check like this.

In a few days I am pleading the Neveu case, which for months has demanded an enormous amount of work and caused a lot of talk. The

mistress of a man in the consular service fired six shots at her lover, at the moment when the latter, in order to get rid of her after giving her two children, was leaving for the Far East, where he'd had himself transferred. She made the mistake of behaving quite cold-bloodedly in the presence of the authorities and the press, telling the latter, with the smoking gun still in her hand, that she dared the courts to condemn her. A reverse, in my present situation, would do me a lot of harm and would be regarded as the beginning of my decline.

I had a bit of luck this week with young Delrieu, who killed his father for reasons which remain rather mysterious and whom I got off with confinement to a mental hospital.

New clients turn up every day. If I listened to Bordenave, I wouldn't receive them. She sits around in her office like a watchdog who's not allowed to bark at the approach of prowlers, and I often see her with red eyes.

I have sometimes thought, in moments of discouragement, that if all the world turned against me I'd still have my secretary to end my days with. Isn't it ironical that towards her I feel a physical antipathy, almost a repulsion, which would prevent me from taking her in my arms or looking at her naked body? I suspect that she has guessed this and is hurt by it, and that because of me she will never belong to any man.

The hardest thing was not so much making my decision as telling Viviane, because, this time, I was conscious of going a bit too far and venturing on to slippery ground. Whatever happens, I shall be lucid to the end and I assume complete responsibility for my actions, for *all* my actions.

The week following the night at Maniere's was one of the most painful and perhaps the most ridiculous of my life. I wonder how I found time to plead cases, to study my clients' affairs and, into the bargain, to be seen with Viviane at a certain number of Paris functions.

It came about, as I expected, through Mazetti and his new tactics. In fact, I can't get rid of the notion that he did it on purpose, and that's obviously not so foolish since it almost came off.

On Sunday evening I had a serious conversation with Yvette and I was sincere, or almost, when I gave her a choice.

'If you decide to marry him, ring him up.'

'No Lucien. I don't want to.'

'Would you be unhappy with him?'

'I can't be happy without you.'

'Are you sure?'

She was so tired that she looked almost ghost-like and she asked me if she might have a drink to pick her up.

'What did he say to you?'

'That he would wait as long as necessary, certain that I will marry him some day.'

'Is he coming back?'

She didn't need to reply.

'In that case, if you've really made up your mind, you must write him a letter which will leave him no hope.'

'What shall I say to him?'

'That you won't see him again.'

She had been making love with him for part of the day and still bore the marks; her bruised lips looked somehow diluted and seemed to swallow up her face.

I partly dictated the letter to her and posted it myself.

'Promise, if he rings you up or comes knocking at the door, that you won't answer.'

'I promise.'

He didn't telephone or try to get into the flat. By the next morning, however, she was on the phone.

'He's there.'

'Where?'

'On the pavement.'

'He hasn't rung your bell?'

'No.'

'What's he doing?'

'Nothing. He's leaning against the house opposite and staring at my windows. What do you advise me to do?'

'I'll come and take you out to lunch.'

I went over. I saw Mazetti standing in the street, unshaven, dirty, as though he had hurried straight from the factory without changing.

He didn't approach us, satisfied to look at Yvette with the eyes of a whipped dog.

When I brought her home an hour later, he wasn't there any more, but he came back the next day, then the day after, his beard longer every time, his

eyes feverish, and he was beginning to look like a beggar.

I don't know how much sincerity there is in his attitude. He's in the middle of a crisis, too. From one day to the next, he seems to have renounced the career for which he has made so many sacrifices, as though only Yvette still mattered in his eyes.

In the course of the week, our glances have crossed several times and I have read a scornful reproach in his eyes.

I have contemplated all imaginable solutions, including impossible ones, like installing Yvette in the lower flat, the one where my chambers and offices are. We've kept a bedroom and bath there which Bordenave uses when she works late.

For hours, this plan excited me. I was intrigued by the prospect of having Yvette within reach day and night, until finally my reason regained the upper hand. It is impractical, obviously, if only because of Viviane. She has accepted a great deal up to now. She is ready to accept plenty more, but she wouldn't go as far as that.

I felt this when I informed her of the decision I have finally reached. It was after luncheon. I had chosen the time purposely, because I was due at the Palais and had only a quarter of an hour to spare, which prevented the conversation from being dangerously prolonged.

As we went into the drawing-room for coffee, I murmured:

'I want to talk to you.'

The strained look that appeared on her features showed me that there wasn't much left to tell her. Was she perhaps expecting a decision even more serious than the one at which I had stopped? In any case I felt the shock and, for one minute to the next she looked her age.

My heart contracted, rather as it does when you are obliged to put away an animal which has long been faithful to you.

'Sit down. Don't talk. It's nothing bad.'

She managed to smile and her smile was hard, defensive; when I told her which flat I had in mind, I knew that it wasn't for sentimental reasons that she stiffened. I even thought for a moment that the fight was on, and I'm not sure I didn't hope so. The two of us would have got it done with once and for all, instead of proceeding by stages. I was determined not to yield.

'For reasons too long to explain to you, which I suppose you are aware of anyhow, it is impossible for her to go on living in a hotel room.'

We always say 'she'; I do it out of tact, my wife out of contempt.

'I know.'

'In that case, it will be easy. It is essential that as soon as possible I settle her in a place unknown to a certain person who is harassing her.'

'I understand. Go ahead.'

'It happens that there is a flat vacant.'

Did she already know, through the agency, for instance?

When we were living in the Place Denfert-Rochereau, the second year if I remember correctly, we were already beginning to find our apartment inconvenient and had dreams of moving closer to the Palais. Several times we had been for walks in the Île Saint-Louis, which attracted us both.

There was a vacant flat there at the time, at the extreme tip of the island, on the spur that faces the Cité and Notre-Dame, and we went to look at it together, exchanging covetous glances. The rent, controlled by law, was not outrageously high, but it was tied in with buying some furnishings, which the state of our finances did not permit us to consider, and we left with heavy hearts.

Later, we were to meet, at a friend's house, an American woman, Miss Wilson, who had not just rented our dream flat but bought it, and I think Viviane later went to tea with her. She was a writer, was always at the Louvre and with artists, and, like certain expatriate American intellectuals, considered her own country barbaric and swore she would end her days in Paris. Everything there enchanted her, the bistros, Les Halles, the little more or less slummy streets, the tramps, the morning *croissants*, the cheap red wine and the *bals musettes*.

Well, two months ago, at forty-five, she married a visiting American, a man younger than herself, a Harvard professor, and followed him to the United States.

She broke completely with her past, with Paris, and commissioned an estate agency to sell her apartment, furniture and furnishings as quickly as possible.

It's two minutes' walk from our house and when I go to see Yvette I won't need to take taxis any more or bother Albert.

'I've thought about it a lot. At first sight it seems crazy, but . .

'Have you bought it?'

'Not yet. I'm seeing the agency man tonight.'

From now on I had before me a woman defending, no longer her happiness, but her interests.

'I suppose you don't intend to take the flat in her name?'

I was expecting that. It was, in fact, my original intention to make Yvette that present, so that whatever may happen to me, she won't find herself out on the street again. Viviane, for her part, will be well provided for when I die, will practically be able to keep up our standard of living, thanks to heavy insurance policies I have taken out for her benefit.

I hesitated. Then, lacking courage, I retreated. I'm furious with myself for that cowardice, for having stammered, blushing:

'Of course not.'

I'm all the more annoyed because she guessed that my original intention was different and this meant a victory for her.

'When are you signing?'

'This evening, if the deed of sale is in order.'

'She's moving in tomorrow?'

'The day after tomorrow.'

She gave a bitter smile, probably remembering our visit years ago, our dismay when we were told how much they wanted for the purchase of a few worthless carpets.

'You haven't got anything else to tell me?'

'No.'

'Are you happy?'

I nodded and she came up to me and put her hand on my shoulder in a gesture that was both protective and affectionate. Because of that gesture, which I had never seen her use, I understood her attitude to me better. For a long time, perhaps always, she has considered me her own creation. Before I knew her, I didn't exist as far as she's concerned. She chose me as Corine chose Jean Moriat, except that I wasn't even a member of parliament, and for me she gave up a luxurious, easy life.

She has helped me rise in my career, certainly—I should be ungrateful if I denied it—by her social activity which has opened plenty of doors to me and brought me a lot of clients. Also she is partly responsible for my name being constantly in the papers, and not only in the legal section, for she has made me a Paris celebrity.

She didn't tell me so that day, didn't reproach me with anything, but I felt that I mustn't risk one step further, that the flat on the Quai d'Orléans, *on condition that it remain in my name*, was the final limit which she would not permit me to pass.

I wonder whether they talk about me, Corine and she, whether they form a sort of clan, for there are a certain number of them in the same situation, or if, on the contrary, they are jealous of each other and exchange false confidences and smiles.

That whole week I was fighting time, for my great fear was that Yvette would break down, that at her window she would make the gesture Mazetti was waiting for to hurl himself into her arms. I telephoned her every hour, even during court recesses, and as soon as I had a moment I would rush to the Rue de Ponthieu where for safety's sake I spent every night.

'If I take you away from here, do you promise me not to write to him, never to let him know your new address, not to go, for the time being, to places where he might find you?'

I didn't immediately understand the terror I read in her eyes. Yet she replied, docile:

'I promise.'

I could tell she was frightened.

'Where is it?'

'Just near my house.'

Then, only, she was relieved and admitted:

'I thought you wanted to send me to the country.'

Because she's scared of the country. A sunset behind trees, even the trees of a Paris square, is enough to plunge her into black melancholy.

'When?'

'Tomorrow.'

'Shall I pack?'

She has enough now to fill a trunk and two suitcases.

'We'll move at night, when we're sure the coast is clear.'

At eleven-thirty, after a banquet given by the President of the Bar, I called for her in the car with Albert. It was Albert who carried down her luggage, while I kept watch, and slushy snow was falling. Two girls walking the pavement in the Rue de Ponthieu first tried to pick me up then watched, curiously, the elopement.

For months I have been living on the promise, for tomorrow or for next week, of a calmer, more peaceful existence. When I bought the apartment on the Quai d'Orléans, I was convinced that it would solve everything and that from then on I would go and see Yvette while taking a walk, as others walk their dog, morning and evening, around the island.

It's not worth continuing this dossier unless I tell everything. I was; seized by an almost adolescent fever. The flat is stylish, feminine, tasteful.

The room on the Boulevard Saint-Michel was like a cheap whorehouse, the one in the Rue de Ponthieu like that of a little Champs-Élysées tart.

Here, it was a new world, almost a leap into the ideal, and, so that Yvette shouldn't feel too much out of place, I dashed over to the Rue Saint-Honoré and bought her underclothes, negligees and housecoats to match the surroundings.

Also, so that she wouldn't think of going out, at least in the beginning, I bought her a gramophone and records and finally a television set, and I filled the bookshelves with fairly spicy books, as she likes them, without going so far as to bring her trashy novels.

Without telling her, I engaged a maid, Jeanine, quite a pretty girl, attractive and talkative, who will keep her company.

I have made no allusion to these arrangements in front of Viviane, but I have reason to think she is informed. During the three days I spent chasing about like this, she took to looking at me with a maternal, rather sympathetic tenderness, as one looks at a boy who is going through the awkward age.

The third night we spent in the new flat, I woke up with the impression that Yvette beside me was terribly hot. I was not mistaken. When I took her temperature, about four in the morning, it was a hundred and three and at seven o'clock the thermometer was close to a hundred and four. I phoned Pémal. He hurried over.

'Quai d'Orléans, you say?' he asked in surprise.

I gave him no explanation. He didn't need any when he found me in the bedroom with Yvette naked in bed.

It isn't anything serious, a bad case of tonsillitis, which lasted a week, with ups and downs. I shuttled between the two houses and between them and the Palais.

This indisposition revealed to me that Yvette has a mortal terror of death. Every time her temperature began to go up again, she would cling to me like an animal in distress, begging me to call the doctor whom I sometimes had to disturb three times in one day.

'Don't let me die, Lucien!'

Often she cried to me for help like this, her eyes staring as if she had caught a glimpse of Lord knows what terrifying beyond.

'I don't want to. Never! Stay with me!'

One of her hands in mine, I would telephone to put off appointments, to apologize for missing others, and I had to call Bordenave over so that I could dictate, beside Yvette's bed, letters which couldn't wait.

Nevertheless, I appeared, in formal dress, at the *Nuit des Etoiles*, and Viviane kept her eye on me, wondering if I would hold out to the end, if I wasn't going to drop everything to rush over to the *Quai d'Orléans*.

To make the situation still more complicated, all I needed, next day, was to find Mazetti, who is still letting his beard grow, on sentry duty outside the house on the *Quai d'Anjou*. He must have figured that I would sooner or later lead him to Yvette and maybe he thinks she is at my home.

I had to use Albert, take the car and make a tour of the island every time I visited the *Quai d'Orléans* and not leave Yvette's flat until I was sure the coast was clear.

If I note these sordid details, it is because they have their importance and help to explain this stupor in which I am living at present.

Fortunately Mazetti didn't persevere. He came three times. I was expecting him to come up, ask to see me, and I had given instructions. I had also thought of the possibility that he might be armed and I kept my revolver in my drawer.

Well, he disappeared from one day to the next, just about the time when Yvette was beginning to feel better.

She is up, almost well again, but she is weak and Pémal gives her the same injections he gives me; he gives us them one after the other, with the same hypodermic, which seems to amuse him.

I don't know whether he has recognized Yvette, whose photograph appeared in the papers at the time of the trial. He must harbour a certain pity for me and maybe he, too, thinks it's the Indian summer.

That expression irritates me. I've always detested simplifications. One of my colleagues, who is talked about nearly as much as I am, on account of his clever remarks, and is reckoned one of the wittiest men in Paris, has an explanation of that sort for every case, an explanation which is both penetrating and over-simple.

For him the world can be reduced to a few human types, life to a certain number of more or less acute crises through which men sooner or later pass, sometimes without noticing it, as they passed through childhood diseases in their youth.

It's attractive, and he has managed to disarm judges by making them laugh at a flash of wit. He must joke about me, and his witticisms make the rounds of the Palais and the drawing-rooms. Isn't it funny, a man of my age, my position—does he perhaps add, of my intelligence?— who is wrecking his whole life and his wife's because one evening a young slut came to ask him to defend her and lifted her skirt to her waist?

What surprises me personally, and I admit it, is that Mazetti should be in love with Yvette and I'm inclined to believe that, if it hadn't been for me, he would hardly have given her a thought.

If some day someone reads the pages of this dossier, he will note that up to now I've never written the word love, and this is not accidental. I don't believe in it. More exactly, I don't believe in what is generally called by that name. I have never loved Viviane, for example, infatuated with her as I was at the time of the Boulevard Malesherbes.

She was the wife of my chief, of a man whom I admired and who was famous. She lived in a world well equipped to dazzle the poor, unsophisticated student that I still was the day before. She was beautiful and I was ugly. To see her yield to me was a miracle which suddenly made me swell with confidence in myself and my destiny.

For I already understood what attracted her in me: a certain power, an inflexible will in which she put her trust.

She was my mistress. She became my wife. Her body gave me pleasure but never haunted my dreams, was never anything but a woman's body, and Viviane played no role in what I believe to be the most important part of my sexual life.

I was grateful to her for having singled me out, for having accepted, for my sake, what I still regarded as a sacrifice, and it was not until much later that I suspected the truth about what she, for her part, called her love.

Wasn't it above all a need to assert herself, to prove to herself and others that she was more than just a pretty woman to be dressed, protected and taken out?

And wasn't there, more than anything else, a craving in her for domination?

Well, she dominated me for twenty years and she's trying to keep on dominating me. Up until the matter of the flat on the Quai d'Orléans she lived without much to worry about, giving me plenty of rope, sure of

herself, sure that I would come back to her after a more or less stormy crisis which offered no threat to her.

What her face revealed to me, during the conversation after lunch, was her sudden discovery of a real threat. For the first time she had the impression that I was getting away from her and that it might be for good.

She reacted as best she could. She continues to play the game, watching me more closely. She is suffering, I know; I see her growing older day by day and she is using more make-up. But it is not on my account that she is suffering. It is on her own, not only because of the situation she has created with me, but because of the idea she has formed of herself and her power.

I am sorry for her and, in spite of the alarmed glances she darts at me, she is not sorry for me. Her solicitude is selfish; what she is waiting for is not for me to regain my serenity but to come back to her. Even if I should come back to her mortally wounded. Even if in future I am to be nothing but an empty body at her side.

How does she explain my passion for Yvette? The others, the women I had before her, she puts down to curiosity and also to masculine conceit, to the need every man feels, especially if he's ugly, to prove to himself that he can reduce a woman to his mercy.

But in most cases it wasn't like that, and I think I am lucid enough in what concerns myself not to be mistaken. If she were right, I should have had gratifying affairs with, among others, some of our women friends whom I could have had without any trouble. And occasionally, rarely, this has happened, always at times of doubt or discouragement.

More often I've slept with girls, professional or non-professional, and when I think about it, I realize that they all had certain things in common with Yvette, which had escaped me until now.

My strongest impulse was probably a craving for pure sex, if I can use that expression without raising a smile, I mean sex without any considerations of emotion or passion. Let's say sex in its raw state. Or its cynical state.

I've listened, sometimes unwillingly, to the confidences of hundreds of clients, men and women, and I've been able to convince myself that I'm not an exception, that a need does exist in the human being to behave at times like an animal.

Perhaps I was wrong to have been afraid to show myself to Viviane in this light, but the idea would never have occurred to me. Who knows if she,

for her part, doesn't hold it against me, if she hasn't sought that particular satisfaction elsewhere?

That's the case with several of our women friends and with almost all the men and, if this instinct were not practically universal, prostitution wouldn't have existed since time immemorial, in all latitudes.

It's a long time since I have had any pleasure with Viviane and she puts my frigidity down to worry and work, and no doubt also to my age.

But I can't be with Yvette for an hour without feeling an urge to see her nakedness, to touch her, to ask her to caress me.

It's not only because I'm not overawed by her, because she's a kid of no importance, nor because I have no inhibitions with her.

Tomorrow it's possible that I may think and write the opposite, but I doubt it. For me Yvette, like most of the girls who have meant anything to me, personifies the female, with her weaknesses, her cowardice, and also with her instinct to cling to the male and make herself his slave.

I remember her surprise and pride the day I slapped her face, and since then she has sometimes driven me to the breaking-point just to see me do it again.

I don't claim that she loves me. I don't want anything to do with that word.

But she has renounced being herself. She has placed her fate in my hands. No matter if it is out of laziness or lack of initiative. It's her role, and I see, perhaps naively, a symbol in the way she once spread her thighs apart on the corner of my desk, after asking me to defend her.

If tomorrow I abandon her, she will turn back, on the streets, into a little bitch wandering about in search of a master.

That, Mazetti cannot have understood. He's got the wrong woman. He hasn't noticed that he had a female to deal with.

She tells lies. She's deceitful. She puts on acts. She makes up stories to worry me and, now that she's sure of her daily bread, she wallows in laziness; there are days when she hardly gets out of bed, keeping the television switched on at the foot of it.

At the sight of a passing male she's on heat and, in the street, she stares at men's trousers, at one definite place, as intensely as men stare at the bottoms of women walking past. More than once it's taken no more to excite her than a picture of underpants or swimming-trunks in a magazine advertisement.

She's done everything with Mazetti that she does with me. She's done it with other men too, ever since she reached puberty. No part of the male, none of his demands, arouses her disgust.

I suffer when I know she is in someone else's arms, I can't help imagining every one of their movements, and yet she wouldn't be herself if she didn't act that way.

Would I have chosen her?

I've just written that word deliberately because, when she came to see me, anyone would have said I was waiting for her; it was that night that I made my decision.

On account of my age?

Perhaps. But it's nothing to do with the Indian summer they talk about. Nor is it anything to do with the change of life or impotence, still less with the need for a younger partner.

I know I'm touching on a complex problem which is most often treated jokingly because that's easier and more reassuring. Usually we only joke about what we're afraid of.

Why, at a certain degree of maturity, shouldn't a man discover that. . .

No! I can't manage to express my meaning exactly, and all the approximations irritate me.

The facts!

The essential fact is that I can't do without her, that I suffer physically when I'm separated from her. The fact is that I need to feel her near me, to watch her live, to breathe her odour, to indulge her and to know she is satisfied.

There still remains an explanation, but no one will believe it: the will to make someone happy, to take charge of someone, completely, someone who owes everything to you, whom you pull out of the abyss knowing that he will fall back into it if you fail him.

Isn't it for the same reason that so many people have a dog or a cat, canaries, or goldfish, and that parents can't resign themselves to seeing their children living their own lives?

Is that what's happened with Viviane and is that why she suffers as she sees me getting away from her? Haven't I, too, suffered every Saturday, imagining Mazetti at the Rue de Ponthieu?

And, in days gone by, Andrieu, the President of the Bar?

Today's Saturday and tonight I can go and see her. There won't be any more damned Saturdays, cruel Saturdays. I'm tired; at the end of my strength, I keep going like a machine with a faulty brake, but she lives two minutes away from me and I'm not in any pain.

That doesn't mean that I'm happy, but I'm not in any pain.

Other troubles are waiting for me; I can feel them ready to descend on me as soon as I think I'm justified in relaxing. My first worry is that my carcass may not hold out. Those people who look at me with a worried or sympathetic eye are beginning to frighten me. What would happen if I became ill and had to stay in bed ?

If I have an attack in the office I could hardly demand to be taken to the Quai d'Orléans. Would I be capable of expressing any wish at all?

And if I fall ill there, won't Viviane come and take me home?

But I don't want to be separated from Yvette at any price. So I simply have to hold out and tomorrow I'll ask Pémal if it wouldn't be a good idea for me to consult a really big man.

We're going out in an hour, Viviane and I, to dine with the South American ambassador. My wife, who's changing already, will wear something new she has had made for the occasion, for they'll all be dressed up to the nines. I've got to wear tails, which will force me to come home after the party and change before going to the Quai d'Orléans.

Yvette's convalescence, her present weakness, won't last for ever. For the moment her hermit's existence, new to her, still delights her. Yesterday, when Jeanine, the maid, was bringing us tea, she said to me:

'You ought to make love to her too. It would be rather like a harem.'

Jeanine, who had her back to her, didn't protest, and I'm convinced she would enjoy it too.

'You wait till you see her with her clothes off!'

Will playing harem keep her quiet for long? When she goes out again, I shall live in torture, not only for fear of Mazetti, whom she might meet by accident, but for fear she may start all over again with someone else.

In spite of her promise, isn't she capable, as soon as she gets out, of making straight for the Quai de Javel?

I can't deliver lovers to her door and she'll be hungry for them some day, even if it's only from having seen a man of a certain type passing in the street.

Jeanine, in fact, is the only one who takes our situation for natural. I don't know where she's worked until now; I think the director of the employment agency told me something about a hotel in Vichy or some other spa.

There's a knock at the door. Albert appears up there, at the top of the stairs, and when he opens his mouth I've already understood.

'Tell Madame I'm coming up.'

It's time for me to dress and before that I must go and give some instructions to Bordenave, who hasn't finished dealing with the post.

Little Duret is with her, straddling a chair, watching her work, knowing that she hates it and that she doesn't like him. He does it on purpose, to make her angry.

He doesn't look at me either with pity or with irony. Everything in life still amuses him, like exasperating Bordenave until she's reduced to tears, and also no doubt whatever he knows about my affair.

'Have you finished the Palut-Rinfret letter?'

'Here it is. In ten minutes the post will be ready to sign. Shall I bring it up to you?'

'Please.'

It would take so little to make her happy. If I could give her a hundredth, a thousandth part of what I offer Yvette. Bordenave would be satisfied with crumbs, would melt with gratitude. Then why is this beyond my power?

During Yvette's illness I thought once that my secretary was going to faint, she was so hurt by our intimacy. Besides, Yvette would deliberately call me Lucien, ask me to do little services for her, just as she would deliberately get out of bed, naked as usual, to go to the bathroom.

I shall find my wife in her slip in front of her dressing-table, for she always waits till I'm ready before putting on her dress.

'We've got a quarter of an hour,' she'll tell me.

'That's plenty.'

'Were you working?'

'Yes.'

Although she doesn't exactly concern herself with what goes on in the office, she suspects the truth about this dossier, which she saw me putting away one day when she dropped in to say goodbye to me. She has antennae for everything that concerns me, which can be irritating. I don't like to be seen through, especially, as is often the case, when it's a matter of petty weaknesses which one would rather hide from oneself.

I ought to go up and can't make up my mind to. I have the feeling that after having searched so hard for the truth I'm as far away from it as before, if not farther. There will be a lot of people at the ambassador's and I shall find myself seated on the right of his young wife who will have eyes for no one but her husband.

Does that couple invalidate my theories—if they can be called theories—or do we have to wait ten or twenty years to find out?

Viviane must be getting impatient and I know why I'm dawdling, why I hesitate. I foresaw that this would happen when I installed Yvette on the Quai d'Orléans.

It was the most dangerous stage, because in order to keep moving forward there is only one possible step left now.

This reluctance to go upstairs, to face Viviane, is in a way a kind of alarm signal.

Let's go! I cause her enough trouble without annoying her by being late.

I must just lock up my dossier and slip the key behind the complete works of Saint-Simon.

VI

Wednesday, November 28

HE'S come, choosing his day and time as inconveniently as possible.

On Sunday evening Yvette had gone out for the first time since she's been living on the Quai d'Orléans. First I had made sure that no one was prowling about in the neighbourhood. She took my arm and all the time we were walking she seemed to be hanging on it, in a pose I've often envied in loving couples. There were couples on the benches, in the Square Notre-Dame, in spite of the cold, and that reminded me of my Pont-Marie tramps. I talked to Yvette about them.

'They had been gone for some time,' I told her, 'and this morning there they were again, the two of them, under the blankets.'

It surprised her that a man of my type should be interested in such people; I could tell from the look she gave me, as if that brought me a bit closer to her.

'Do you watch them through binoculars ?'

'I never thought of that.'

'I would.'

'Wait. Well, this morning, the woman got up first and made a fire between two stones. When the man crawled out of the heap of rags, I saw that he had red hair, that it wasn't the same man. This one is taller, younger.'

'Maybe they put the other one in prison.'

'Maybe.'

We had dinner at the Rotisserie Perigourdine, where she chose the most elaborate dishes, then we went to a cinema on the Boulevard Saint-Michel. It seemed to me that when she glimpsed from a distance the hotel I had taken her to after the trial she became gloomy. It would be hard for her already to go back to poverty, even to a certain kind of mediocrity. Miss Wilson's flat has had its effect. Even the street, through which a cold wind was blowing and where the people were walking quickly, frightened her a bit.

A sad film was being shown, and several times, in the dark, her hand groped for mine. Coming out, I asked her what she wanted to do and she replied without hesitating:

'Go home.'

This is all the more unexpected as, even at the Rue de Ponthieu, she always put off that moment. For the first time she feels sheltered, feels she has a home. I left her early, because Monday morning was a heavy one for me, like almost all my mornings. For a month it's been stormy or raining, and we haven't had more than half a day of sunshine. People all have colds and are irritable. At the Palais several cases have had to be adjourned because one party or the other had 'flu.

In the evening my wife and I were to dine with Corine, where you rarely get to table before half-past nine and where, the last few days, there's been considerable excitement. The country is without a government. The various candidates for premier have been considered and they say that Moriat will be the last-minute choice, that he already has his cabinet in his pocket. According to Viviane, he wants to set up, as appears to be advisable when

the public loses confidence, a government of specialists selected from people unconnected with politics.

'If it hadn't been for the two or three rather too sensational cases you've handled, he would have insisted on you for Garde des Sceaux,' my wife added.

That would never have occurred to me. She thought of it. The funny thing is that it has been she who has expressed an implicit reproach for my having accepted certain briefs; she must have forgotten the incident at Sully.

I left the Palais fairly early, a few minutes before six, and went to the Quai d'Orléans where I found Yvette in a new negligee in front of the log fire.

'You're so cold,' she remarked when I kissed her. 'Hurry up and get warm.'

At first I thought it was the flames in the fireplace that were giving her eyes an unusual sparkle, a sort of mischievous look. Then I assumed she had a surprise in store for me, because she set about making martinis with feverish haste while I was warming myself, sitting on a hassock.

'Remember what I told you the other day?'

I still didn't know what she was referring to.

'We were talking about it, the two of us, this afternoon. I'm not joking. Jeanine would like to. She told me she hasn't had a boy friend for two months.'

She had emptied her glass and was watching me.

'Shall I call her?'

I didn't dare to say no. She went to the door.

'Jeanine! Come here.'

* * *

Suddenly the telephone bell filled the room and, although telephone bells are impersonal, I knew it was my wife ringing. She spoke only one sentence:

'It's nine o'clock, Lucien.'

I answered, as though caught out:

'I'm coming straight away.'

I found out afterwards, when I got back from the Rue Saint-Dominique, where we didn't see Moriat, that Yvette and Jeanine didn't get dressed after I left, that they went on drinking martinis and swapping stories. They didn't have any dinner, just snacks from the refrigerator.

'It's a shame you had to leave. You can't imagine how funny Jeanine is when she cuts loose. You'd think she was made of rubber. She can hold the most difficult poses just like a circus acrobat.'

This morning I was empty. I won't go so far as to claim that I had a guilty conscience or that I was ashamed, but this experience left me with a queer taste in my mouth and a certain uneasiness.

Perhaps this is due to the fact that for some time now I've been catching glimpses of the stage ahead. I try not to think about it, to persuade myself that we're all right as we are, that there's no longer any reason to change.

I was following the same reasoning when I took the room on the Boulevard Saint-Michel for Yvette and again when I installed her in the Rue de Ponthieu. Ever since I've known her, an obscure force is pushing me forward, independent of my will.

It embarrasses me more and more to be alone with Viviane, to take her around town, to be, in the eyes of the world, her husband, her companion, while Yvette mopes around waiting for me.

Does she really mope around? I come close to believing it. As far as I'm concerned, I always feel the same 'something missing', the same agonizing unsteadiness, as soon as I'm separated from her.

A time will come when I shall face the only acceptable solution: that she share my life completely. I'm not blind to what that means, nor to the inevitable consequences. That still seems to me an impossibility, but I've seen so many other impossibilities realized in time!

A year ago the Quai d'Orléans would have looked like an impossibility too, even three months ago.

Viviane, who senses it, is getting ready for the fray. Because she won't give up without defending herself ferociously. I shall have not only her against me, but the whole world, the Palais, the press, our friends, who are her friends more than mine.

It won't happen tomorrow. It's still in the sphere of dreams. I'm keeping a grip on the present, trying to take pleasure in it and find it acceptable. All the same I'm still clear-sighted enough to realize that it's not the end.

Precisely because of this state of mind, our threesome of the day before yesterday bothers me. Since it's happened once, it will happen again. Perhaps that's the way to prevent Yvette seeking pleasure elsewhere, but it's possible that it won't end there and that what has taken place at the Quai d'Orléans will inexorably take place later at the Quai d'Anjou.

After a cold shower, I was in my office by a quarter past eight on Wednesday morning, making a few telephone calls and catching up on current business before the conference set for nine o'clock.

The three men were punctual for the appointment and we went to work, Bordenave seeing to it that we weren't disturbed.

A very big deal is involved: the purchase by Joseph Bocca, and no doubt by people behind him, of a chain of big hotels. One of the men at the conference was the successor of Coutelle, who has retired to Fécamp, a younger fellow who has the title of count and is a regular habitue of Fouquet's and Maxim's, where I've often seen him.

Facing us we had one of my colleagues, with whom I'm on excellent terms, representing the sellers, accompanied by a fat, shy gentleman carrying a heavy brief-case, who proved to be the top expert on company law.

The deal is completely above-board. It's simply a matter of working out the terms so as to avoid taxes to the greatest possible extent.

The fat gentleman passed out cigars, and by ten o'clock the air in my office was blueish and it smelt like a smoking-room after dinner. From time to time I heard the telephone bell in the adjoining office and I knew Bordenave was there to answer it. I wasn't worried. For a long time she's had orders to interrupt me in the middle of any work at all, any conversation at all, as soon as Yvette telephones and this has occurred several times. I can imagine what it costs my secretary to obey my orders.

It was just after half-past ten, and our conference was still going on, when there was a light knock at the door. Bordenave came in without waiting for an answer, as I've told her to, and approached the desk on which she put down an appointment slip, and stood there waiting for the reply.

There was just one word, written with a ballpoint pen, a name: Mazetti.

'He's here?'

'For the last half-hour.'

Bordenave had a serious, worried face, which implies to me that she knows what's up.

'Did you tell him I'm in conference?'

'Yes.'

'Didn't you ask him to come back another time?'

'He said he'd rather wait. Just a minute ago he asked me to bring you his slip and I didn't dare to annoy him.'

My colleague and the two other men were talking in undertones in order to appear not to be listening.

'What's he like?'

'More impatient than when he got here.'

'Tell him again that I'm busy and that I'm sorry I can't see him at once. He can wait or call again, whichever he likes.'

Then I understood why she had disturbed me.

'You don't want me to take any action?'

I suppose she was thinking of the police. I shook my head negatively, less confident than I wanted to appear. This visit would have worried me less a fortnight ago, when Mazetti used to keep watch under my windows, because then it would have been a natural reaction. I don't like him reappearing like this after going two weeks without showing a sign of life. This doesn't fit in with my expectations. I sense something wrong.

'I apologize for the interruption, gentlemen. Where were we?'

'If it's a matter of importance, perhaps we could meet again tomorrow.'

'Not at all.'

I was well enough in control of myself to continue the discussion for three-quarters of an hour, and I don't think my attention wandered once. At the Palais they claim that I'm capable of writing the text of a tricky appeal while dictating letters simultaneously and making telephone calls on the side. That's exaggerated, but it's true that I can follow two ideas at once without losing track of either one of them.

At a quarter past eleven, my callers got up, the stout little man put away his documents in his brief-case, offered another round of cigars, as if to reward us, and we shook hands at the door.

Alone again, I barely had time to come back to my chair when Bordenave came in.

'Will you see him now?'

'Is he still upset?'

'I don't know if you can call it upset. What I don't like is his fixed stare and the fact that he's talking to himself in the waiting-room. Do you think it's all right for you to . . .'

'Bring him in as soon as I ring.'

I took a few steps back and forth, without any definite reason, as athletes loosen up their muscles before an event. I glanced at the Seine, then, sitting down, opened the drawer where the revolver lies within reach of my hand. I

laid a sheet of paper over it, so that with the drawer open the gun wouldn't show and it wouldn't look like a provocation. I know it's loaded. I don't carry forethought so far as to release the safety-catch.

I press the buzzer and wait. Bordenave must be going to fetch my visitor from the waiting-room, the small one, I suppose, the one where, just over a year ago, Yvette, too, waited a long time for me. I hear the steps of two people approaching, a quick knock, and the door swings open.

Mazetti comes forward two or three feet and looks smaller than I remember him, more awkward too, more like a factory-hand than a student.

'You want to talk to me?'

I motion him to the chair on the other side of my desk, but he waits, standing up, until my secretary has closed the door behind her, listens to be sure she is going away.

He has seen my three callers leave. The air is still opaque with smoke and there are cigar-stubs in the ashtray. He has noted all that. So he knows that Bordenave hasn't been lying to him.

He is freshly shaved, cleanly dressed. He doesn't wear an overcoat but a leather jacket, because he usually gets around by motor cycle. He seems thinner, and his eyes are sunken in their sockets. I thought he was handsome. He isn't. His eyes are too close together; his nose, which must have been broken, is still crooked. He doesn't alarm me. Instead, I'm sorry for him and for a moment I imagine that he's come here to confide in me.

'Sit down.'

He refuses. He doesn't want to sit down. Standing up, his arms dangling, he hesitates, opens his mouth two or three times before coming out with:

'I need to know where she is.'

His voice is hoarse. He hasn't had time to get it in pitch or to familiarize himself with the rather solemn atmosphere of my office, with its gallery. Others besides him have been intimidated by it.

I wasn't expecting such a simple, direct question straight off, and I spend a few moments looking for an answer.

'First, let me inform you that you have no proof that I know where she is.'

Both of us have said 'she', as if there were no need to mention any name.

His lip has twisted slightly into a bitter smile. Without giving him time to retort, I went on:

'Supposing I do know it and she doesn't want her address given out, I have no right to reveal it to you.'

He stares at the half-open drawer, repeats:

'I need to see her.'

It disturbs me that he remains standing while I am seated, and I don't dare to get up because I want to stay within reach of the revolver. The situation is ridiculous and I wouldn't have our interview recorded by a film camera or a tape-recorder for anything in the world.

How old is he? Twenty-two? Twenty-three? Till now I've thought of him as a man: he was the male who was pursuing Yvette, and now suddenly he looks to me like a little boy.

'Listen to me, Mazetti . . .'

That's not my voice either. I'm looking for the right tone without finding it, and I'm not proud of the result.

'The person you are speaking of has made a decision and informed you of it honestly. . . .'

'It was you who dictated the letter.'

I blushed. I can't help it.

'Even if I did dictate it, she wrote it, knowing what she was doing. So she decided her future with her eyes wide open.'

He raises his eyes to give me a look which is both sad and callous at the same time. I begin to understand what Bordenave meant.

Perhaps because of his thick eyebrows which meet, his face has a shifty expression; you sense a restrained violence in him which might break out at any minute.

Why doesn't it break out? What keep him from raising his voice in an outburst of threats and accusations against me? Isn't it more than anything else the fact that I'm an important, famous man and that I'm receiving him in a setting whose opulence overawes him?

He's the child of a bricklayer and a dish-washer, has been brought up with his brothers and sisters in a poor neighbourhood and has heard the bosses spoken of as inaccessible people. For him, men above a certain social level are made of different stuff from him. I've almost been through that myself, when I started out at the Boulevard Malesherbes, and yet I had no such heavy heritage of humility.

'I want to see her,' he repeats. 'I've got some things to tell her.'

'I regret that I'm not in a position to oblige you.'

'You refuse to give me her address?'

'I'm extremely sorry.'

'Is she still in Paris?'

He tried to bluff, to trick me, as Yvette would have done. I look at him without saying anything and he goes on in a lower voice, head down, without looking at me:

'You have no right to act like this. You know I love her.'

Isn't it wrong of me to reply:

'She doesn't love you.'

Am I going to begin to discuss love with a young man, to try to prove to him that it is to me that Yvette belongs, to argue over our respective claims to ownership?

'Give me her address,' he repeats, his forehead obstinate.

And as he moves his hand towards his pocket I make a slight gesture towards the open drawer. This he immediately understands. It was his handkerchief he wanted, because he has a cold, and he mutters:

'Don't be afraid. I'm not armed.'

'I'm not afraid.'

'Then tell me where she is.'

What direction have his thoughts taken during the fortnight since he showed any sign of life? I don't know. A wall stands between him and me. I was expecting violence and find myself confronted by something muted, morbid, disquieting. The idea even occurred to me that he had made his way into my office with the intention of committing suicide there.

'Tell me. I promise you that she will decide for herself.'

He adds, to goad me:

'What have you got to be afraid of?'

'She doesn't want to see you again.'

'Why?'

What am I to reply to that question?

'I'm sorry, Mazetti. Let me ask you not to insist, because my position will not change. You will soon have forgotten her, believe me, and then . . .'

I stopped in time. After all I couldn't go so far as to say to him:

'. . . and then you'll be grateful to me.'

At that moment my cheeks flushed hotly, because a memory of the previous evening came back to me: our three naked bodies in the cloudy water of a mirror.

'I ask you once more . . .'

'It's no.'

'Do you realize what you are doing?'

'I've been in the habit of taking the responsibility for my actions for a long time.'

I felt as if I were reading a bad part in a worse play.

'You'll regret it some day.'

'That's nobody's business but mine.'

'You're cruel. You are doing a wicked thing.'

Why did he use words to me which I wasn't expecting, in an attitude which didn't go with his young tough's body? The climax would have been for him to burst into tears, and perhaps it almost came to that, for I saw his lip tremble. Wasn't it suppressed rage?

'A wicked thing and a cowardly one, Monsieur Gobillot.'

Hearing him pronounce my name startled me, and the 'Monsieur' suddenly introduced a curious note of formality into our interview.

'Once again, I'm sorry to disappoint you.'

'How is she?'

'All right.'

'She hasn't spoken of me?'

'No.'

'She . . .'

He saw that, my patience exhausted, I was pressing the buzzer.

'You'll regret it.'

Bordenave, on the alert, opened the door.

'Show Monsieur Mazetti out.'

Then, standing in the middle of the office, he looked at us in turn with his heavy eyes, and-this lasted an eternity. He opened his mouth, didn't say anything, merely dropped his head and walked towards the door. I remained motionless for a while and when I heard the engine of his motorcycle start up I rushed to the window. I saw him in his leather jacket, bare-headed, his hair tousled by the November wind, disappearing down the Rue des Deux-Ponts.

If I had any liquor in my office, I would have poured myself a drink, to get rid of the bad taste in my mouth which seemed to me the bad taste of life.

He has upset me more than he has worried me. I feel that he's going to bring up new questions which won't be easy to answer.

* * *

I had to interrupt myself to take a telephone call from an opposing counsel who asked me if I would agree to an adjournment. I said yes without arguing and this surprised him. Then I called Bordenave in and, without referring to the visit I had received, I dictated for an hour and a half, after which I went upstairs for lunch.

An old question is bothering me, which has often bothered me and which I always end by putting aside, unless I make do with a half-satisfactory explanation. Since my adolescence, I might say since my childhood in the Rue Visconti, I've never believed in conventional morality, the morality you learn from textbooks and meet again later in official speeches and in articles in orthodox newspapers.

Twenty years in my profession and association with what is called Paris society, which includes the Corines and the Moriats, haven't done anything to change my opinion.

When I took Viviane away from Maitre Andrieu I didn't consider myself a dishonourable man or feel guilty, any more than I had any feeling of guilt about installing Yvette on the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

I wasn't guilty of anything yesterday either, when Jeanine joined in the fun in front of the big mirror in which Yvette found it amusing to watch us. I was more dissatisfied with myself on the canal bank at Sully, the evening I accepted Joseph Bocca's proposition, because that was a question of principle, because it didn't correspond to my idea of my career.

It happened again later, it happened often, especially in the professional field, just as the reputation for integrity of certain colleagues sometimes makes me envious, or the serenity of good women on their way out from Mass.

I don't repent of anything. I don't believe in anything. I've never felt remorse, but what troubles me from time to time is being seized with a longing for a different life, in fact a life which would have more in common with prize-giving speeches and picture-books.

Have I been wrong about myself since the beginning of my existence? Did my father know these same tortures and did he regret that he wasn't a husband and family man like the others?

Like what others? I've been able to satisfy myself from experience that 'families like others' don't exist, that all you have to do is to scratch the surface and get to the bottom of things to find the same men, the same

women, the same temptations and the same failings. Only the front changes, the greater or lesser degree of candour or discretion—or illusions?

In that case, then, how is it that I am periodically restless, as if it were possible to behave in a different fashion?

Does a being like Viviane know these same disturbing thoughts?

I find her, upstairs, tall and neat in a dark woollen dress relieved only by a diamond clip.

'Are you forgetting that it's the Sauget auction at the Hotel Drouot today?'

Since I bought the flat on the Quai d'Orléans, she has developed a mania for spending, especially on personal things, particularly jewellery, as if she were getting her own back or making things even. The Sauget auction is a sale of jewellery.

'Tired?'

'Not too.'

'Are you pleading a case?'

'Two uninteresting ones. In the third, which is harder, the other side wants an adjournment.'

If only she could get out of the habit of examining me as though to discern my secrets or a moment of weakness in my face! It's become an obsession. Perhaps she's always had it, but I never noticed it before.

It's Albert who waits on us at table, busy and silent.

'Did you read the news about Moriat?'

'I haven't read the papers.'

'He's making up his cabinet now.'

'The list Corine read us yesterday?'

'With a few insignificant changes. One of your colleagues will be Garde des Sceaux in the new cabinet.'

'Who?'

'Guess.'

'I haven't the slightest idea and it doesn't interest me.'

'Riboulet.'

What I might call an honest, ambitious man, I mean a man who uses his reputation for honesty to get to the top or, if you prefer, who has chosen honesty because it is sometimes the easiest way. He has five children whom he is bringing up according to rigid principles, and they say he belongs to the Third Order of Oblates. It wouldn't be surprising, because he gets nearly

all the ecclesiastical cases and he's the man rich people turn to when they want their marriage annulled by Rome.

'Did you see Pémal?'

'Not this morning. I had a conference.'

'Is he still giving you injections?'

To make me admit that now he gives me them at the Quai d'Orléans. This is becoming embarrassing. We are not yet enemies, but we can find nothing to say to each other, and mealtimes are growing increasingly unpleasant.

She thinks of nothing but getting me back or, to put it differently, of my break with Yvette, out of weariness or for any other reason, while I, for my part, am obsessed with the desire to see Yvette in her place.

How can we look each other in the face under these conditions? I'm sure, for instance—the idea suddenly came to me at table—that if she found out about this morning's visit and knew Mazetti's address Viviane would not hesitate to inform him somehow or other where Yvette is to be found.

The more I think about it the more it frightens me. In Mazetti's place, I wonder if I wouldn't telephone Viviane to ask her the question which he repeatedly asked me this morning. With her, he would get somewhere!

It's time I regained my balance. Most of my troubles arise from my fatigue, and this gives me a new idea which is enough to dispel the others. Since I'm always being told that I ought to take a holiday, why not take advantage of the Christmas recess and go away somewhere, to the mountains or the Riviera, with Yvette? It would be the first time we'd travelled together, and the first time she'd seen any scenery apart from Lyons and Paris.

How will Viviane react? I foresee friction. She will defend herself, talk about the harm it would do me from a professional point of view.

Here I am, all excited at the prospect. I was talking about a new stage. I was trying to guess what it would be. Well, here it is: a journey, together, like a real couple!

Just the word 'couple' alone seems to me marvellous. We've never made a couple, Yvette and I. For a few days at least we'll be one, and at the hotel the servants will call her Madame.

How could my mood change so much, within a few minutes?

'What's the matter with you?'

'With me?'

'Yes. You've just thought of something.'

'It was you who mentioned my health.'

'Well?'

'Nothing. The idea occurred to me that Christmas isn't far off and that I might give myself a break.'

'At last!'

She doesn't suspect the truth or she wouldn't have sighed with relief: '*At last!*'

I simply must drop in at Yvette's for a moment on my way to the Palais, to tell her the big news. How my plan is to be worked out, I don't know yet, but I know it will be.

'Where are you planning to go?'

'I haven't the least idea.'

'To Sully?'

'Certainly not.'

I don't know what aberration made us buy a country house near Sully. Even the first year I found the forest of Orléans gloomy, oppressive, and I can't stand people who talk about nothing but wild boar, guns and dogs.

'For ages Bocca's been inviting you to come to his place at Mentone, even if he's not there. They say it's unique.'

'I'll see.'

She is beginning to be worried, because I said 'I' and because I'm not asking her advice. Am I getting wild ? I feel bad about it and yet I can't restrain myself. I'm light-hearted. I have no problems any more. Yvette and I are going away on holiday to act as Monsieur and Madame. This title will touch her. It hadn't occurred to me before. When we go out in Paris, she's always called Mademoiselle. In a hotel in the mountains or on the Riviera, it will be different.

'Are you in a hurry?'

'Yes.'

It's a pity there are still three weeks to wait. It seems an eternity to me and, as I know myself, I'm going to start being afraid of all kinds of hindrances. To be all right, we ought to leave today and from then on I wouldn't give another thought to Mazetti or to our disgusting interview. It wouldn't take much to make me drop everything and go away without telling Viviane.

I can imagine her face when she received a telegram or a telephone call from Chamoix or Cannes!

'Has anything happened this morning?' she asks, casually.

There it is? She's guessed, again, and it exasperates me.

'What should have happened?'

'I don't know. You don't seem your usual self.'

'How do I seem?'

'As if you wanted at any price to avoid thinking about an annoying subject.'

I hesitate to get angry, because this hits home. Perhaps it would relieve me to lose my temper, even if it were only, as she says, to forget Mazetti, but I still have enough self-possession to see that if I start it will be hard for me to stop.

How far would I go? I have too much on my mind and I'm not prepared for a break today. I want to avoid an explosion. Besides, they're waiting for me at the Palais, in two different courts.

'You're very subtle, aren't you?'

'I'm beginning to know you.'

'Are you so sure?'

She has the inward smile of someone who has never doubted herself.

'A lot better than you think!' she declares.

I get up from table without waiting for her to finish her dessert.

'Excuse me.'

'Of course.'

At the door I hesitate. It's hard for me to leave her like this.

'See you soon.'

'I suppose we'll meet at Gaby's for cocktails, won't we?'

'I hope I can get there.'

'You promised her husband.'

'I'll do my best.'

As I leave the building, it occurs to me to make sure that Mazetti isn't in the neighbourhood. No! I don't see anything. Life is beautiful. I walk along the quay. There is a white dust suspended in the air, but it can't be called snow yet. The couple of tramps, under the bridge, are busy going through some old papers.

The staircase is familiar to me. It's the same, or almost the same, as the one at the Quai d'Anjou, with a wrought-iron banister which is always cold

to your hand and stone steps as far as the first floor.

The flat is on the third floor. I have a key. It is a pleasure to me to use it and yet, every time, I'm overcome with anxiety because I wonder what is in store for me.

In the hall, I open my mouth to tell her the news, to call out in a triumphant voice:

'Guess where the two of us are going to spend Christmas.'

But Jeanine appears, in a black dress and a white apron, an embroidered cap on her head, very much the theatrical maidservant, and puts a finger to her lips.

'Ssh!'

My glance, already anxious, questions her, although Jeanine is smiling.

'What is it?'

'Nothing,' she whispers, bending forward. 'She's sound asleep.'

With affectionate complicity she takes my hand and leads me to the bedroom door which she opens a crack, and in the semi-darkness I can distinguish Yvette's hair on the pillow, the outline of her body under the bedclothes, a bare foot sticking out.

Jeanine goes and covers it up soundlessly, comes back to me and closes the door again.

'Do you want me to give her a message?'

'No. I'll come back this evening.'

Her eyes are twinkling. She must be thinking of what happened yesterday, and it amuses her; she stands nearer to me than usual, brushing me with her breasts.

On my way out, I ask:

'Nobody's been here?'

'No. Who should have been here?'

She must know all about it. Yvette has certainly told her the story of her life, and it was wrong of me to ask that question.

'Did you get any rest?' she asks in turn.

'Yes, a bit. Thanks.'

* * *

I just had time to hurry into the robing-room and put on my gown. Judge Vigernon, a martinet who doesn't like me and has a nervous habit of stroking his beard, was looking around for me as I dashed into court.

'The case of Guillaume Dande versus Alexandrine Bretonneau,'
declaimed the clerk. 'Guillaume Dande? Stand up when your name is called
and answer: "Present".'

'Present.'

'Alexandrine Bretonneau?'

Impatient, he repeats:

'Alexandrine Bretonneau!'

The judge searches the rows of faces as if he were about to discover her
in the anonymous crowd, and finally the woman appears, fat, out of breath,
having waited for an hour in another court to which she had been directed
by mistake.

From the far end of the room she calls:

'Here I am, your Honour! I beg your pardon. . . .'

There is a pervading smell of official building and unwashed humanity,
which is to some extent the smell of my own stable.

Am I not at home here?

VII

I WAS about to write that just lately my life has been too busy to leave me
any leisure to open the dossier cupboard. It was no less busy in the weeks
before this. Tiredness? Or haven't I felt the same need to reassure myself?

From time to time, however, I have scribbled words on my note-pad, sort
of memory-joggers which I go over and explain.

Thursday, November 29

'Skiing trousers, Pémal.'

It was on Tuesday evening, two days before this note, that I mentioned a
holiday to Yvette, and her reaction was unexpected. She looked at me
suspiciously and said:

'Do you want to send me away somewhere to get rid of me?'

I don't remember the phrase I had used, something like:

'Get ready to spend Christmas in the mountains or on the Riviera.'

The idea never occurred to her that I might be going with her. I reassured her, but for a while she was still worried, finding it too wonderful.

'Will your wife let you go?'

I lied so that she wouldn't worry about it.

'She's been told.'

'What did she say?'

'Nothing.'

Only then did she call Jeanine in, needing an audience.

'Do you know what he's just told me? We're going to spend Christmas in the snow.'

It was my turn to frown, because I'm not planning to take Jeanine. Fortunately that wasn't what 'we' had meant to Yvette.

'Or on the Riviera,' I added.

'If I'm to choose, I'd prefer the mountains. They say there's nothing but old people on the Riviera in winter. What is there to do there anyhow, if you can't swim or sunbathe? I've always dreamed of skiing. Do you know how?'

'A bit.'

I took a few lessons, a long time ago.

The next day, when I went to see her, she was wearing black gaberdine skiing trousers, partly to show them off to me, partly because she liked them herself; they were very tight and outlined her little round behind.

'Like them?'

Pémal, who came to give us our injections, found her in them and she pulled her trousers down like a man. In the hall, he couldn't help pausing in front of the skis she has also bought and looking at me with an inquisitive glance. I said:

'Yes indeed! I've finally decided to take a holiday.'

I went out on to the landing with him and whispered:

'Don't mention it at the Quai d'Anjou.'

Yvette has also bought a bulky Norwegian woollen sweater with a design of reindeer. I'll have to see about booking rooms at the hotel, because for the Christmas season everything in the mountains is full; I found that out years ago.

Saturday, December 1

'Prime Minister's dinner. Viviane—Mme Moriat.'

Jean Moriat, who is Premier as was expected, has taken up residence in the Hotel Matignon with his wife, his legal one, but still spends almost every night at the Rue Saint-Dominique. That Saturday he was giving a semi-official dinner to which, in addition to his closest collaborators, he had invited a few friends. We were included, and Corine too, of course. Madame Moriat, who is hardly known, was hostess and went about it so awkwardly, with such an obvious dread of making gaffes, that one felt a desire to go to her rescue.

I don't think she minds about her husband's liaison. She doesn't hold it against him and if she thinks that either one of them is to blame, she takes it upon herself. During the whole reception, then during the dinner, she seemed to be apologizing for being there, ill at ease in a high-style dress which didn't suit her, and at embarrassing moments I saw her turn to Corine to ask her advice.

She is so basically humble that you reach the point of not wanting to look at her or speak to her, because you feel so strongly that it embarrasses her. She can breathe easily only when she's forgotten in her corner, which did happen several times, especially after dinner.

In the car coming home, Viviane murmured :

'Poor man!'

'Who?'

'Moriat.'

'Why?'

'It's awful for him, in his position, to be saddled with a wife like that. If she had the least bit of dignity she would have given him his freedom long ago.'

'Has he suggested a divorce?'

'I don't think he's ever dared to.'

'If he were free, would Corine marry him?'

'It's almost impossible for them to get married. It would be political suicide, because Corine's too rich and he'd be accused of having married for money. If you ask me, they both want to keep the poor woman as a front.'

I was struck by this reflection, if only because it emphasizes Viviane's cruelty towards the weak and shows what she must think of Yvette in her heart of hearts, the tone she must use in talking to her friends about her.

'Are you serious about your holiday plans?'

'Yes.'

'Where?'

'I don't know yet.'

Not only does she still think she's going with me, but she's sure I'll choose the sea because, the few times we have been to the mountains, I've complained of feeling as though I were in a hostile climate there. I bet she'll lose no time ordering clothes for the Riviera and I swear to myself not to say a word until the last minute.

* * *

Sunday, December 2

'Pants, Jeanine.'

I wonder what Bordenave thought if she saw that note on my pad. This Sunday, like most other Sundays, I spent the afternoon at the Quai d'Orléans. It was freezing. The people in the street were walking quickly and in the flat the log fire gave off a pleasant smell.

Yvette asked me:

'Are you sure you don't want to go out?'

She is acquiring a taste for curling up cosily, purring, in the overheated atmosphere of the sitting-room or the bedroom, and Jeanine, as was to be expected, is occupying a larger and larger place in her personal life, in ours too, which sometimes bothers me. I realize that for Yvette it's a good thing. She has never been so relaxed, nearly always gay, with a gaiety which doesn't seem forced as it used to. I'm pretty sure she doesn't think about Mazetti much.

I got there in time for coffee, and, as Jeanine was serving us, Yvette suggested:

'Feel her buttocks.'

Without knowing why she should tell me to do this, I passed my hand over her behind, while Yvette went on:

'Don't you notice anything?'

Oh yes. Under her dress there were no petticoats, no underclothes, nothing but her skin, over which the black fabric slid easily.

'We've decided that she shouldn't wear pants any more at home. It's more fun.'

The mood of both girls, when they're together, is charmingly light-hearted, and often, when I come in, I hear them whispering, bursting into laughter, and occasionally, too, they exchange knowing looks over my

shoulder. Jeanine, who seems to be flourishing here, is blossoming forth and makes a great fuss of Yvette and of me. Sometimes, showing me out, she asks me in a low voice:

'What do you think of her? She seems happy, doesn't she?'

It's true, but I've seen her acting too many parts not to be on the defensive. As we were lying there, watching the flames dancing, Yvette began to talk about her experiences in a joking, ironical way, not always in harmony with the images she provoked, because she revealed certain perversions which I hadn't suspected, some of which distressed me. She's making a game of this at present, addressing herself mainly to Jeanine, who laps up her words, quivering.

That Sunday I discovered that Yvette isn't as unconscious of how things are as she is trying to appear. When we were alone together with the light out, she huddled herself in my arms. I could feel her trembling from time to time and at last I asked her:

'What are you thinking about?'

She shook her head, rubbing her hair against my cheek, and it wasn't until a tear fell on my chest that I knew she was crying. She was incapable of speaking right away. Touched, I embraced her tenderly.

'Tell me now, child.'

'I was thinking about what would happen.'

She began to cry again, continuing in jerky sentences:

'I couldn't bear it any more. I put up a brave front, I've always put up a brave front, but . . .'

She sniffed; I knew she was wiping her nose on the sheet.

'If you left me, I think I'd go and throw myself into the Seine.'

I knew she wouldn't do it, because death terrifies her, but perhaps she would try, changing her mind at the last minute, perhaps to arouse the pity of spectators. But there's no doubt either that she would be unhappy.

'You're the first man who's given me a chance to live decently and I still wonder why. I'm no good. I've hurt you and I'll go on hurting you.'

'Ssh.'

'Do you mind about Jeanine?'

'No.'

'She has to have some fun too. She's nice to me. She thinks up all kinds of things to make life pleasant for me, and when you're not there I'm not always exactly cheerful.'

I make allowances for her play-acting. It's always present, mixed up with her sincerity. The last phrase, for example, is too much, and I wondered if, on the contrary, it isn't when she's alone with Jeanine that she's at her liveliest.

It's the same with her as with Mazetti. No matter if she does see me in the crudest, least-flattering light, I'm still the great lawyer who saved her and besides, to her, I'm a rich man. I would swear that she entertains respect and admiration for Viviane and that she would be frightened at the idea of taking her place.

'When you're tired of me, will you tell me?'

'I'll never be tired of you.'

The logs crackle, the darkness is tinged with deep pink, we can hear Jeanine, on the other side of the wall, moving about in her room, then dropping heavily on her bed.

'Did you know she's had a child?'

'When?'

'When she was nineteen. She's twenty-five now. She put it out to nurse in the country, and they neglected it so badly that it died of digestive trouble. They said its stomach was all swollen.'

My mother, too, turned me over to some people in the country.

'Are you happy, Lucien?'

'Yes.'

'In spite of all the trouble I bring you?'

Fortunately she finally goes to sleep, and I think for a time about Mazetti. He hasn't returned to hang around the Quai d'Anjou and that worries me, irritates me, as anything I don't understand always does. I promise myself to think about him tomorrow and at last it's my turn to fall asleep, on the very edge of the bed, because Yvette's curled up in the middle and I don't want to wake her.

* * *

Tuesday, December 4

'Gregoire—Javel.'

I couldn't do it on Monday after all, because that's a big day for me, taken up mostly with telephone calls, for, when people come back from weekends, they seem to be seized with remorse and throw themselves frantically into serious business.

I could set up a kind of barometer for people's moods during the week. On Tuesday they get back to normal, but the temperature goes up again on Thursday afternoon so that they can get through faster and leave for the country by noon on Friday, Friday morning if possible.

So it was on Tuesday, according to my note-pad, that I telephoned Gregoire, whom I used to know in the Latin Quarter and who has become a professor in the Faculty of Medicine. We don't meet once in five years, but from habit we still say 'tu' to each other.

'And you? Your wife?'

'Very well, thank you. I wanted to ask you a favour because I don't know who else to ask.'

'I'll be glad to help you if I can.'

'It's about a student named Leonard Mazetti.'

'It's not a matter of his exams, I hope.'

His voice suddenly became colder.

'No. I'd like to know if he is really registered in the School of Medicine and if he's been attending classes regularly lately.'

'What year is he in?'

'I don't know. He must be twenty-two or twenty-three.'

'I'll have to ask the registrar's office. I'll ring you back.'

'Can it be handled discreetly?'

'Of course.'

He is wondering why I'm concerned about this young man. I wonder myself why I'm going to so much trouble. Because that isn't the end. Now I ring the Citroën office, on the Quai de Javel. A few years ago I happened to plead a case for the company and thus got to know one of the directors.

'Is Monsieur Jeambin still with you?'

'Yes, sir. What name please?'

'Maitre Gobillot.'

'Just a minute. I'll see if he's in his office.'

A little later, a different voice, that of a busy man.

'Yes.'

'I'd like to ask you a small favour, Monsieur Jeambin . . .'

'Excuse me, who is that speaking? The operator didn't catch the name.'

'Gobillot, the lawyer.'

'How are you?'

'Very well, thank you. I'd like to know whether a man named Mazetti is working for you as a factory-hand, and if so, if he hasn't had an unusual absentee record recently.'

'That's easy, but it will take a little while. Will you ring me back in an hour?'

'I'd rather he didn't know about it.'

'Is he in trouble?'

'Not at all. Don't worry.'

'I'll take care of it.'

I got the two replies. Mazetti wasn't lying. He's been working for three years at the Quai de Javel where his absences are rare and nearly always coincide with examination periods, except for the last two, which go back to the time when he was watching Yvette from the pavement of the Rue de Ponthieu. And this week he's been out only twice.

It's the same thing at the Medical School, where he is in his fourth year and where he cut classes for a week at the same period.

'I made inquiries about this boy,' Gregoire added, 'not knowing exactly what you want. He's not a brilliant student, his intelligence is just average if not below average, but he is such a hard worker that he does well in his exams and he'll go through all right. It looks as though he'd make an excellent country doctor.'

So Mazetti has taken up again the regular rhythm of his existence, working by night at the Quai de Javel and attending lectures or in the operating-theatre during the day.

Does this mean that he has calmed down and is beginning to get over it? I'd like to believe it. I think of him as little as possible.

Except for him, the present period would be the best I've known for a long time.

* * *

Thursday, December 6

'Saint-Moritz.'

This time it's snowing in big soft flakes which still won't lie on the ground but are already leaving white streaks on the roofs. This reminds me that I ought to book our hotel room if we want to go away for Christmas. I couldn't make up my mind, thinking first of Megève or Chamonix, where Viviane and I went years ago. I read in the paper that everything is full for

the holidays. That doesn't mean there's no more room, I know how newspapers are, but it did remind me that a lot of my young colleagues, crazy about skiing, go to those two resorts.

I have no intention of hiding Yvette. I'm not ashamed of her. Anyhow, I have good reason to think that everyone knows.

Still, it would be unpleasant to find ourselves in the same hotel as lawyers whom I meet every day at the Palais, especially if they are with their wives. I don't give a damn about making myself ridiculous. I'll be ridiculous on skis all right anyhow. But I want to spare Yvette any incident which might spoil our holiday, and, with certain wives, that might happen.

That's why I finally decided on Saint-Moritz. The people there are different, more international, less familiar. The luxurious style of the Palace Hotel will make her feel strange at first, but it will be easier for us to maintain a certain anonymity.

So I telephoned. I got the reception manager on the line and he seemed to know my name, although I've never stayed there. Almost full, he told me, putting me down just the same for a room with a bath and a small sitting-room.

'Overlooking the skating rink,' he specified.

That same day, after dinner, Viviane opened the latest issue of *Vogue* and showed me a white dress with heavy pleats which is by no means unattractive.

'Like it?'

'Very much.'

'I ordered it this afternoon.'

For Cannes, I've no doubt. The dress is called 'Riviera' but I didn't smile; I had no desire to, because, as the time for explanations approaches, I realize more fully that it's going to be hard.

All the harder since my attitude recently is reassuring to her. It's the first time, to my knowledge, that she's been grossly mistaken. At first she worried when she saw that I was in a more easy-going, almost relaxed state. She may even have mentioned it to P  mal, who sees her quite often, and I don't know what he would have said.

'It looks to me as though your vitamins are doing you good.'

'Why shouldn't they?'

'Don't you feel better than you did a fortnight ago?'

'Yes, I think I do.'

Perhaps she also thinks that having Yvette so handy, just a stone's throw from home, is beginning to produce a certain satiety. She doesn't suspect that the very opposite is true and that now it seems to me a monstrosity to leave the Quai d'Orléans for a few hours.

So let her order her dresses for the Riviera. There'll be nothing to -stop her going there alone while Yvette and I are at Saint-Moritz.

For a long time I had a tendency to feel pity for Viviane. That's over. I observe her coldly, like a stranger. Her reflections on poor Madame Moriat, when we left the Hotel Matignon, are part of the reason. In rehashing the past, I have discovered that Viviane herself has never pitied anyone.

When she left, did she pity Andrieu? Of course, it would be improper for me to blame her for it. Nevertheless it's a fact and if she were thirty today or even forty, she wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice me as she sacrificed her first husband.

This has reminded me of the way he died and I'm embarrassed by it, just when I'm going to Saint-Moritz, which isn't far from Davos.

* * *

Sunday, December 9

'Jeanine.'

I wonder why I wrote that name on my note-pad when I came home. I must have had a reason. Did I have some precise thought or did I only have her vaguely in mind?

Since it was Sunday, I spent the afternoon at the Quai d'Orléans and, I remember now, part of the evening but not the night, because we were to meet Moriat, who had a political dinner, at the Rue Saint-Dominique at about half-past ten. That was the evening when Viviane announced that we were spending the Christmas holidays in the Midi, at Cannes she specified without consulting me, and Corine gave me a glance which makes me think she has an inkling of my plans.

What happened with Jeanine that hasn't happened on other Sundays and some week nights ? She is increasingly at her ease with us, free of any inhibitions, and once Yvette remarked:

'Even when I was a little girl, I used to dream of living in a place where everyone would be naked and spend their time petting and doing anything they liked with each other.'

She smiled at her memories.

'I used to call it playing Earthly Paradise, and I was eleven when my mother caught me playing Earthly Paradise with a little boy called Jacques.'

It wasn't on account of that phrase that I wrote down Jeanine's name. Nor, I suppose, because of another reflection of Yvette's, who was gravely watching us, Jeanine and me, in an embrace.

'That's wonderful!' she suddenly exclaimed with a laugh which immobilized us.

'What's wonderful?'

'Didn't you hear what she just said to you?'

'That I was hurting her a bit?'

'Not exactly. She said:

' "Monsieur, you're hurting me a bit!"

'I think that's funny. It's as if she spoke to you in the third person to ask your permission to . . .'

The end of the sentence was crude, the image comical. In these circumstances, she likes to use precise, vulgar words.

Oh yes! I remember. It's a thought which came to me and which I wanted to remember, although it's not specially important. Jeanine seems to have taken Yvette under her wing, not against me but against the rest of the world. She seems to have grasped the bond between us, which I find extraordinary, and she's doing her utmost to build up a sort of zone of security around us.

I can't explain myself precisely. After the episode I've just mentioned, it would be ridiculous to speak of a maternal feeling, and yet that's what I have in mind. Making Yvette happy has become a game for her, and a reason for living too. She's grateful to me for having gone in for it before she did; she approves of everything I do to this end.

It's rather as if she were taking me under her wing too, although, if I stopped behaving in the same way, if a quarrel, for instance, or a difference of opinion broke out between Yvette and me, I would be faced with an enemy.

She isn't a lesbian, mentally or physically. Unlike Yvette, before she came to the Quai d'Orléans, she had never had anything to do with women.

It doesn't matter. I don't remember why I thought of that when I came home. More exactly, I didn't suspect that it would be connected with a subsequent event.

It's only now that I know the reason why she advised me, that Sunday:

'Don't let her get too tired today.'

Tuesday, December 11

'Caillard.'

An exhausting appearance in court, three hours spent working on the jury in order to obtain a sentence of ten years' penal servitude when, without the mitigating circumstances that by some unknown miracle I managed to disclose, my client would have seen himself condemned to hard labour for life.

Instead of being grateful, he looked at me stonily, muttering:

'A lot of good all that fancy talk did!'

On the strength of my reputation he was counting on an acquittal. His name is Caillard and I'm beginning to regret—because he deserves it—that they didn't take him out of circulation for good.

I found Yvette already in bed by nine o'clock that evening.

'You'd better let her sleep,' Jeanine advised me.

I don't know what came over me. As a matter of fact, I do know. After the nervous effort of an important speech in court, after the strain of waiting for the verdict, I nearly always feel the need to let off steam violently, and for years I used to go straight to a brothel on the Rue Duphot. I'm not unique in this.

Through the half-open door I had seen just Yvette asleep. I hesitated, looking inquiringly at Jeanine, who blushed slightly.

'Here?' she whispered, in reply to my unspoken question.

I nodded. I didn't want anything more than a quick tumble. A little later, I heard Yvette's voice saying:

'Are you having a good time, you two? Why don't you open the door so I can see you?'

She wasn't jealous. When I went to kiss her, she asked me:

'Did she do all right?'

And she turned over on her side to go to sleep again.

* * *

Wednesday, December 12

'????'

Jeanine finally talked to me, on the stairs, as she was showing me out. At eleven in the morning Yvette was still in bed, looking sickly, and I had

noticed her breakfast untouched on a tray.

'Don't worry. It's nothing. Have you got the railway tickets?'

'I got them yesterday. They're in my pocket.'

'Don't lose them. Do you know it'll be the first time I've travelled in a sleeper?'

Because she had looked troubled, a bit washed-out, as if I had seen her through a veil, I asked Jeanine in the hall:

'It's not because of yesterday, is it?'

'No . . . Hush! . . .'

It was then that she followed me out to the stairs.

'I'd better tell you now. What's worrying her is that she thinks she's pregnant and she's wondering how you'll take it.'

I stood still, one hand on the banister, my eyes staring. I didn't analyse my emotion and I'm still incapable of doing so; I only know that it was one of the most unexpected and one of the most violent ones of my life.

It took quite a while for me to get control of myself and I pushed Jeanine aside to go back up the stairs. I rushed to the bedroom and cried:

'Yvette!'

I don't know what my voice was like or the expression on my face as she sat upright.

'Is it true?'

'What?'

'What Jeanine's just told me.'

'What did she tell you?'

I wondered how she failed to understand at a glance that my reaction was one of joy.

'Are you angry?'

'No, darling! Anything but! And last night, I . . .'

Exactly!

And it was for the same reason that on Sunday Jeanine had advised me not to tire Yvette!

For my wife and myself there was never any question of children. That's a subject she never brought up and I concluded from that and also from the precautions she has always taken that she didn't want any. Besides, I've never seen her look at a child in the street, on a beach or in other people's houses. For her they are a strange, vulgar, almost indecent world.

I remember the tone in which she said, when someone told us that the wife of one of my colleagues was pregnant for the fourth time:

'Some women are born to be rabbits. Some of them even like it!'

You would think maternity disgusted her; maybe she considers it a humiliation?

Yvette, for her part, was sitting there in her bed, scared, ashamed, but not for the same reason.

'You know, if you'd rather I got rid of it . . .'

'Has this ever happened to you before me?'

'Five times. I didn't dare to tell you. I was wondering what I ought to do. With all the complications I've involved you in already . . .'

My eyes were misty and I didn't grab her in my arms. I was afraid of being theatrical. I just took her hand and kissed it for the first time. Jeanine was tactful enough to leave us alone.

'Are you sure?'

'You can't be sure so soon, but it's ten days already.'

She saw me turn pale, and understanding why, she hastened to add: 'I've counted. If it's true, it can only be yours.'

My throat was tight.

'It would be funny, wouldn't it? You know, this doesn't stop us going to Switzerland. I'm staying in bed because Jeanine won't let me get up. She says if I want to keep it I've got to rest for a few days.'

Funny girl! Funny girls, both of them!

'Would you really be pleased?'

Naturally! I haven't thought about it yet. She's right in saying that it will mean complications. And yet I'm happy, touched, affected as I can't remember ever being before.

'In two or three days, if nothing happens, I'll see the doctor and have a test.'

'Why not straight away?'

'You want to? Are you in a hurry?'

'Yes.'

'In that case, I'll send a specimen to the lab tomorrow morning. Jeanine can take it. Call her.'

And to Jeanine:

'Do you know? He wants me to keep it!'

'I know.'

'What did he say when you told him?'

'Nothing. He stood quite still and I was afraid he was going to fall downstairs, then he nearly knocked me over as he rushed up here.'

She's making fun of me.

'He insists you're to take a specimen to the lab tomorrow morning.'

'Then I'll have to go and buy a sterilized bottle.'

All this is familiar routine to both of them.

I'm due in my office. Bordenave telephones for instructions. It is Jeanine who answers.

'What shall I say?'

'That I'll be there in a few minutes.'

It's better for me to leave, because there's nothing more I can do here just at present.

* * *

Thursday, December 13

'Specimen sent off. Dinner Embassy.'

That means my South American ambassador, who gave an intimate but extremely elegant dinner to celebrate our success. Thanks to Moriat, the arms are under way unmolested to some port or other where they are feverishly awaited, and the *coup d'etat* is planned for January.

In addition to my fee, I received a gold cigarette-case.

Friday, December 14

'Waiting. Viviane.'

Waiting for the result of the test, which we won't know until tomorrow. Viviane's impatience.

'Have you booked a suite for us at the hotel?'

'Not yet.'

'The Bernards are going to Monte Carlo.'

'Oh.'

'Are you listening?'

'You said the Bernards are going to Monte Carlo and since that doesn't interest me I said "Oh".'

'Monte Carlo doesn't interest you?' I shrug my shoulders. 'I prefer Cannes myself. What about you?'

'I don't mind.'

There'll be a change in a few days, but for the moment in dealing with her I'm almost jaunty. My smile baffles her, because she doesn't know what to think any more, and suddenly she gets angry. 'When do you intend to do something about it?'

'About what?'

'About Cannes.'

'We have time.'

'Not if we want a suite at the Carlton.'

'Why the Carlton?'

'We've always stayed there.' To get it over with, I retorted: 'Why don't you telephone yourself?'

'May I tell your secretary to?'

'Why not?'

Bordenave heard me speaking to Saint-Moritz. She will understand, won't say anything, and will have red eyes again.

Saturday, December 15

'Positive.'

VIII

Monday, December 17

I DON'T know what happened about the flowers, and this will remain one of those irritating little mysteries. On Saturday, before going to the Palais, I stopped in at Lachaume's to send six bunches of roses to the Quai d'Orléans. I had taken a taxi and kept it while I dropped into the shop. I can still see myself pointing out the dark red roses to the salesgirl. She knows me and asked:

'No card, Maitre?'

'It's not necessary.'

I'm sure I gave Yvette's name and address, or else I'm forced to believe that I'm subject to lapses. Outside, the driver was arguing with a policeman who was telling him to keep moving and who exclaimed when he, too, recognized me:

'Excuse me, Maitre. I didn't know he was with you.'

When I called at the Quai d'Orléans before dinner, I wasn't thinking about the flowers any more and I didn't notice anything. I didn't stay long, telling Yvette I had to dine out and would see her about eleven.

At the Quai d'Anjou I went straight up to the bedroom to change, and Viviane's sardonic smile, as she went on dressing, made me wrinkle my brows.

'It's nice of you!' she said after I'd taken off my tie and coat and was looking at her in the glass.

'What?'

'Sending me flowers. As there wasn't a card, I assumed they were from you. Was I wrong?'

That very moment I caught sight of my roses in a big vase on a little table. This reminded me that Yvette hadn't mentioned them and that I hadn't noticed any flowers in the flat.

'I hope they didn't come to the wrong address?' Viviane went on.

She's convinced they did. I had no reason at all to send her flowers today. I don't understand how the mistake occurred. I've thought about it more than I wanted to because these mysteries plague me until I find a plausible explanation for them. At Lachaume's I gave Yvette's name, I'm certain: *Yvette Maudet*, and I can still see the young woman writing it on an envelope. Did I then automatically dictate the Quai d'Anjou address instead of that on the Quai d'Orléans?

In that case, Albert, unsuspecting, unpacked the flowers in the butler's pantry without reading what was written on the envelope and, seeing nothing in it, threw it in the waste-paper basket. Viviane, who must have reached the same conclusions as I have, no doubt went and rummaged there.

It was too late to send more flowers and, the next day being Sunday, the shops were closed; it didn't occur to me that I could have gone to the flower market, which is no distance away. I didn't go to Yvette's until after luncheon, because I worked all morning, and she told me she had given

Jeanine permission to go and see her sister, who keeps a little restaurant with her husband at Fontenay-sous-Bois.

The weather was ideal, cold but sunny.

'What do you say to going out for a breath of air?' she proposed.

She put on her beaver coat, which I bought her at the beginning of the season, while she was still living at the Rue de Ponthieu, and which means more to her than any of her other possessions, because it's her first fur coat. Perhaps she only wanted to go out in order to wear it?

'Where do you want to go?'

A lot of couples and families had had the same idea, and from the Rue de Rivoli on we were caught up, on the pavements, in a sort of procession which made a characteristic noise of feet dragging on the stones, a Sunday noise, because people walk more slowly, not going anywhere, stopping in front of all the shop windows. Christmas isn't far away and there are spectacular displays everywhere.

In front of the Magasins du Louvre the crowd was channelled by barriers, and we were content with admiring, from the ramparts, the brilliant fairyland which illuminates the whole facade.

'Suppose we go and see what they've done this year at the Galeries and the Printemps?'

Night had fallen. Tired families were sitting around the braziers on cafe terraces. I don't know if this is a new part she is acting. You would have said she was enjoying imitating the middle-class couples we were following, and the only thing lacking was some children to hold by the hand.

She hardly talks about her coming motherhood at all and, when she does refer to it, it is unemotionally, as though she already took it for granted. In her eyes it holds nothing mysterious or frightening as it does in a man's. She is pregnant, and for the first time she is going to keep her baby. That's all. What upset her for a moment was that I should make her keep it. She wasn't expecting that.

I wonder if it wasn't to thank me and, at the same time, to show herself in the reassuring role she's about to play, that she proposed this walk, so foreign to her habits and mine.

We stopped in front of the same displays as the crowd, moving forward, then stopping again a few yards farther on, and whiffs of various scents, on the pavements, mingled with the smell of dust.

'Where would you like to have dinner?'

'Shall we go and have some *choucroute*?'

It was too early and we went into a cafe near the Opera.

'You're not tired?'

'No. Are you?'

I felt a certain lassitude, but I'm not sure that it was purely physical. Anyhow it had nothing directly to do with Yvette. It was what I'd call a cosmic melancholy, aroused no doubt by the depressing tramping of the crowd.

We dined at the Alsatian brasserie in the Rue d'Enghien, where we've often eaten *choucroute*, and although I suggested a cinema afterwards, she preferred to go home.

About ten o'clock, while we were watching television, we heard the key turn in the lock and for the first time I saw Jeanine in her Sunday best, very respectable in a navy-blue skirt, a white blouse and a blue coat, with a little red hat on her head. Her make-up was different, so was her scent.

We went on watching television. Yvette, who had yawned two or three times, suggested a hot toddy, and at half-past eleven everyone in the flat was asleep.

It's been one of the calmest, slowest days I have lived through for a long time. Shall I admit that it has left an after-taste which I'd rather not analyse?

IX

Cannes, Tuesday, December 25

THE sun is shining, people without coats are walking on the Croisette whose palm-trees are outlined against the blue of the sea, against the purplish blue of the Esterel, while little white boats seem to hang suspended in the universe.

I have insisted that my wife go out with Geraldine Philipeau, the friend she met in the foyer of the Carlton when we arrived and whom she hadn't

seen for years. She dates back before my time, and they fell right into each other's arms.

I'm going to make an attempt to put down everything in order, although it seems useless. There's a calendar in front of me, but I don't need it to remember by. These pages aren't the same size as the others, because I'm using hotel paper.

I've just re-read what I wrote in my office on the morning of December 17, a Monday, as though that had happened in another universe, or anyhow a long time ago, and it takes an effort to convince myself that the Christmas I am now living through is the same Christmas for which Yvette and I watched the preparations that Sunday, in the streets of Paris.

On the Monday morning, I sent her flowers, making sure this time that they should reach her and no one else, and when I went up to give her a kiss at noon, she was obviously touched by them. Through not having thought of it, I had never given her flowers, except in a cafe or on a terrace, and then nearly always violets.

'You know, you treat me like a lady,' she remarked. 'Come and see how beautiful they are.'

I spent the afternoon at the Palais. I had promised Viviane to be home early, because that evening we were giving what we call the President's dinner, a dinner we give every year for all the old greybeards of the Bar.

My intention, in returning by way of the Quai d'Orléans, was just to go up for a few seconds. It happened that, as I crossed the footbridge which joins the Cité to the Île Saint-Louis, I glanced at the windows of the flat. This isn't my usual habit. The pink windows stood out, and I remember noticing that one got an impression of a comfortable, downy nest, of a good place to live *à deux*. The young couples who stroll along the quays, not able to walk straight because they have their arms around each other's waists, must sometimes glance at our windows sighing:

'Later on, when we . . .'

I didn't need to use my key, because, recognizing my step on the stairs, Jeanine opened the door, and I realized that something was wrong. 'Is she ill?'

Jeanine, following me through the entrance hall, asked: 'Haven't you seen her?'

'No. Has she gone out?'

She didn't know what kind of face to put on it. 'About three o'clock.'

'Without saying where she was going?'

'Only that she wanted to go out for a walk.'

It was half-past seven. Since she had been living at the Quai d'Orléans, Yvette had never come home so late.

'Perhaps she's gone to buy some things,' Jeanine went on. 'Did she say anything about it?'

'Not directly, but she told me about everything she'd seen yesterday in the shop windows. She'll surely be back any minute.'

I realized that she didn't believe it. I didn't believe it either.

'Did she suddenly get the idea of going out?'

'Yes.'

'She hadn't received any phone call?'

'No. The phone hasn't rung all day.'

'What state was she in?'

This is what Jeanine doesn't want to tell me, for fear of betraying Yvette.

'Wouldn't you like me to bring you something to drink?'

'No.'

I sank into an armchair in the living-room, but I didn't stay there long, not being able to keep still.

'Would you rather I stayed here or left you?'

'She didn't mention Mazetti?'

'No.'

'Never?'

'Not for several days.'

'Did she speak of him fondly?'

She says no, and I feel that this isn't entirely true.

'Don't think about it, Monsieur. She'll come back and . .

At eight o'clock she had not come back, nor at half-past eight either, and, when the telephone rang, I snatched it up. It was Viviane.

'Have you forgotten that we have fourteen people for dinner?'

'I won't be there.'

'What?'

'I won't be there.'

'What's going on?'

'Nothing.'

I can't go and get dressed to dine with the President of the Bar, my colleagues and their wives.

'Something wrong?'

'No.'

'You won't tell me?'

'No. Make my excuses to them. Invent what you like and tell them I may get there later in the evening.'

I have thought of all eventualities, and with Yvette everything is possible, even that she is at this moment in a disreputable hotel with a man she didn't know at noon. That happened during the Rue de Ponthieu period. Lately she has changed, seemed like a different girl, but her metamorphoses are brief.

Is that what Jeanine thinks? She is trying, half-heartedly, to take my mind off it. In the end she persuaded me to drink a whiskey and she was right.

'You mustn't be cross with her.'

'I'm not cross with her.'

'It's not her fault.'

It's Mazetti she has in mind, too. Has Yvette ever forgotten him? And even if, for a time, he did lose all interest for her, isn't it possible that the approach of the holidays, for example, should have brought back memories?

It's not likely that we met him yesterday in the Sunday crowds and she didn't tell me. But we passed hundreds of other couples, other men, one of whom perhaps looked like him, and that might have been enough.

I don't know. I'm all at sea.

Even her motherhood . . . Maybe she rushed over to Javel to tell him?

We both tremble every time we hear steps on the stairs. It's never for our floor, and we've never heard the sounds of the building so clearly as today.

'Why don't you go to your dinner party?'

'It's impossible.'

'It would stop you thinking. You're driving yourself crazy here. I promise to phone you as soon as she gets in.'

It's my wife who phones, about ten o'clock.

'They're in the drawing-room. I got away for a moment. You'd better tell me the truth.'

'I don't know it.'

'She's not ill?'

'No.'

'An accident?'

'I don't know.'

'You mean she's disappeared?'

There was a silence, then she brought out in a strained voice:

'I hope it's nothing serious.'

Eleven o'clock. Jeanine has tried in vain to get me to eat. I couldn't. I've drunk two or three glasses of liquor; I didn't count them. I don't dare to call the police for fear of setting all the machinery in motion when the truth is perhaps too simple.

'She never told you his address?'

'Mazetti's? No. I only know it's somewhere near the Quai de Javel.'

'Or the name of his hotel?'

'No.'

It occurs to me to try to find Mazetti's hotel, but I realize that it won't work. I know the district and if I went from one cheap hotel to another asking for him, they wouldn't even answer me.

At ten past twelve, Viviane rings me again and I'm annoyed with her for raising false hopes each time.

'No news?'

'No.'

'They've just left.'

I hang up and suddenly I seize my coat and hat.

'Where are you going?'

'To make sure nothing has happened to her.'

This isn't the same as telephoning the police. I cross the Parvis Notre-Dame and enter the courtyard of the Prefecture of Police by the back entrance, where there are only a few lighted windows. The deserted corridors, where my steps echo, are familiar to me. Two men turn round as I pass and I push the door of the Emergency Squad, where a voice exclaims good-naturedly:

'Well: Maitre Gobillot's come to see us. You can bet some crime or other's just being committed.'

It's Griset, an inspector I've known for a long time. He gets up and shakes hands. There are three of them in the vast room, where the telephone switchboard contains hundreds of holes and where, from time to time, a light flashes on a map of Paris on the wall.

Then one of the men sticks a plug in one of the holes.

'Quartier Saint-Victor? That you, Golombani? Your van's just gone out. Serious? No? Street fight? All right.'

All the small news items of Paris converge here, where the three men smoke their pipes or their cigarettes and one of them is preparing coffee on a spirit-lamp.

This reminds me that Yvette spoke of buying a spirit-lamp one morning a long time ago, while I was dressing, so tired that I was dizzy.

'Will you have a cup, Maitre?'

They are wondering what I've come for, although it's not the first time I've been to see them.

'May I use your telephone?'

'Use this one. It's an outside line.'

I dial the number of the Quai d'Orléans.

'It's me. No news?'

Of course not. I go up to Griset, who has a toothbrush moustache in which his cigarette has in course of time outlined a dark circle.

'You haven't been informed of an accident or anything involving a young girl?'

'Not since I came on duty. Wait.'

He consults a ledger with a black cover.

'What name?'

'Yvette Maudet.'

'No. I see a Bertha Costermans, taken ill in the street, who's been moved to hospital, but she's a Belgian and she's thirty-nine.'

He doesn't ask me any questions. I watch the little lights flashing on the map of Paris, particularly those of the Fifteenth Arrondissement, the Javel district. I thought of calling Citroën's, but the offices are closed and the workshops wouldn't give me any information. Even if they told me Mazetti is at work, would my mind be entirely at rest? What would that mean?

'Hello, Grandes-Carrières, what's happened over there? . . . What?

. . . Yes . . . I'll send you the ambulance . . .'

He turns to me.

'It's not a woman, but a North African who's been stabbed.'

Sitting on the edge of a table, my legs dangling, my hat pushed back, I drink the coffee someone has handed me, then, incapable of sitting still, I begin to walk about.

'What kind of girl?' asks Griset, not out of curiosity but in the hope of helping me.

What am I to tell him? How am I to describe Yvette?

'She's twenty and doesn't look it. She's small, slim, wearing a beaver coat and her hair in a pony-tail.'

I ring Jeanine once more.

'It's me again.'

'Still nothing.'

'I'm on my way.'

I don't want to make an exhibition of my impatience, and it's worse here, watching a light flash on every five minutes, than at the Quai d'Orléans. They've understood me. Griset promises:

'If anything comes up, I'll give you a ring. Are you are home?'

'No.'

I write down the Quai d'Orléans address and telephone number for him.

What's the good of going into detail about that night? Jeanine opened the door to me. Neither of us went to bed, we didn't undress, we stayed in the sitting-room, both in armchairs, watching the telephone and jumping every time a taxi passed beneath the windows.

How did I leave Yvette at noon? I try to remember and already I can't any more. I would like to recapture her last glance, as if it were capable of providing a clue.

We saw the day break, and before that Jeanine had dropped off a couple of times; possibly I did too, without realizing it. At eight o'clock, while she was making coffee, I caught sight from the window of a boy on a bicycle with a bundle of newspapers under his arm, and that gave me the idea of buying a paper. Wouldn't I find news of Yvette there?

Jeanine was looking at the pages over my shoulder.

'Nothing.'

Bordenave telephoned me.

'You're not forgetting that you've got an appointment at ten with the Minister of Public Works?'

'I won't be there.'

'And the other appointments?'

'Do something about them.'

Through some kind of irony, I wasn't the one to answer the real telephone call; it was Jeanine.

'Just a minute. Yes, he's here. Here he is.'

I questioned her with my eyes and understood that she preferred not to tell me anything. I had hardly grasped the phone when I heard her burst into

sobs behind me.

'Gobillot speaking.'

'Inspector Tichauer, Maitre. My night colleague left me a message to get in touch with you if. . .'

'Yes. What's happened?'

'You did say Yvette Maudet, didn't you? Aged twenty, born at Lyons. The girl who last year . . .'

'Yes . . .'

I stood motionless, not breathing.

'She was stabbed to death tonight at the Hotel de Vilna on the Quai de Javel. The murderer, after wandering about the neighbourhood for several hours, has just given himself up at the Rue Lacordaire police station. The police van went to the scene, and the victim was found in the room he had stated. The man is a factory worker named Mazetti, who has made a complete confession.'

* * *

Wednesday, December 26

The rest I learned later, and the papers are still taking about it with my name in big type. I could have avoided it. My colleague Luciani telephoned me as soon as he had been instructed to defend Mazetti. The latter, indifferent to what becomes of him, simply pointed to the first Italian-sounding name on the list which the examining magistrate handed him. Luciani wanted to know if he was to try to keep my name out of it. I said no.

Yvette was naked when they found her body, with a wound in the left breast, on the narrow iron bed. I went over there. I saw her before they took her away. I saw the room. I saw the hotel where the stairs were crowded with the men who frightened her.

I saw Mazetti, and we looked at each other; I was the one who looked away; there was no trace of remorse on his face.

To the police, to the examining magistrate, to his lawyer, he would only repeat:

'She came. I begged her to stay, and when she wanted to leave, I stopped her.'

So she did try to return to the Quai d'Orléans.

She had been determined to go over there first, and in the room was found a thick Norwegian knitted woollen sweater, a man's sweater, just like her own, which must have been intended as her Christmas present. The cardboard box, with the name of the shop, was under the bed.

We buried her, Jeanine and I, because her family, notified by telegram, put in no appearance.

'What shall I do with her things?'

I told her I had no idea, that she could keep them if she liked.

I had a talk with the examining magistrate and told him that since I couldn't undertake the defence of Mazetti, as I wanted to, I would testify in court. This surprised him. People looked at me as if they couldn't understand me, Viviane too.

On my return from the funeral, she asked me without any hope:

'Don't you think it would do you good to get away from Paris for a few days?'

I agreed.

'Where do you want to go?' she went on, astonished at so easy a victory.

'Didn't you reserve a suite at Cannes?'

'When do you intend to leave?'

'As soon as there's a train.'

'This evening?'

'All right.'

I don't even hate her. It doesn't matter whether she's there or not, whether she speaks or keeps silent, whether she imagines she's still controlling our destiny. For me she has ceased to exist. 'In case of emergency . . .' I wrote somewhere. My colleague Luciani, to whom I'm going to send this dossier, will perhaps find in it what he needs to get Mazetti acquitted, or anyhow to spare him too stiff a sentence.

As for me, I'll go on defending the real scum.

'Golden Gate'

Cannes,

September 8, 1955

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